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AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARD RITUAL MITZVOT

IN THE AMERICAN REFORM MOVEMENT

1885-1987

Sharyn H. Henry

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

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DIGEST

This rabbinical thesis examines the changing role of ritual mitzvot in the American Reform movement. It begins by putting the issue into the context of Judaism as a whole. Reform's break from the traditional Jewish conception of a literal revelation allowed it to develop different theological interpretations of mitzvot, both ethical and ritual.

The first chapter, "Theology and Theory" examines the ideas of major and/or influential American Reform theologians The analyis focuses on issues of revelation, authority, and God-concept, and how they relate to, and influence, attitudes to mitzvah and halachah. The chapter includes discussion of the theologies of Isaac M. Wise, Kaufmann Kohler, Samuel S. Cohon, Frederic Doppelt and David Polish, Jakob J. Petuchowski, Alvin J. Reines, W. Gunther Plaut, the contributors of the theological essays included in Gates of Mitzvah, and Eugene Borowitz.

Chapter Two, "From Theory to Practice" begins with a history of the American Reform movement's attitude toward authority. The chapter next traces practical developments in the Reform movement with respect to issues of authority as well as the theologies presented in the first chapter It analyzes the three platforms established by the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, The Columbus Platform of 1937 and the Centenary Perspective of 1976. The various guides, both individual efforts by Reform rabbis and the collective products of the CCAR, are analyzed in like manner, as are the responsa literature and rabbi's manuals. Examination of these documents establishes that the Reform movement has become increasingly more traditional with respect to concepts of mitzvah and halachah.

The third chapter, "Psychological Interpretations," surveys the psychological theories of cognitive consistency and social influence to provide a social-

psychological understanding of the developments noted in the movement. It is concluded that individual Reform Jews, and the movement as a whole, have consistenly shown evidence of being uncomfortable with inconsistency. Much of this discomfort is related to trying to reconcile being Jewish in a gentile world Because attitude theory states that changes in behavior may precipitate attitudinal changes, many practical and theological changes may be seen as means by which Reform Jews have strived to achieve consistency. Early Reform emphasized ethical mandates, modern Reform stressed ritual

"Final Remarks," the concluding chapter of this thesis, notes that contemporary Reform has found a middle ground with respect to most issues connected with authority and with ritual and ethical mitzvot

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Sharyn H Henry
Adar, 5748

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

Modern American Reform Judaism is a complex of personalities and institutions. It is the totality of three major components: the Central Conference of American Rabbis (the rabbinical branch), the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (the lay membership), and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (the rabbinical school). The history of Reform Judaism is linked with the political, social, and intellectual histories of the modern world from the eighteenth century to the present.

Traditional Judaism has held the basic belief that the creator God established a special relationship with the Jews. God first redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt and then established an eternal covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. God is therefore entitled to everlasting loyalty, which means strict adherence to the commandments delineated in the Written and Oral Law. Within this system, Jews serve God by observance of commandments. A comprehensive system of 613 mitzvot developed by rabbinic authorities, the taryag mitzvot, details the way in which most human behavior should be conducted. In this way, traditional Judaism has meant an all-ecompassing way of life

This ancient religious system was irrevocably changed, however, with the first reforms of Judaism in Europe. The first practical reforms, occurring in Holland, were primarily concerned with the aesthetics of synagogue worship: services were shortened, some prayers and the sermon were spoken in the vernacular, decorum and instrumental music were introduced. Many of these first alterations were initiated by lay leaders rather than rabbis. The first reforms left traditional Jewish theology unchallenged.

Later, however, German rabbis and scholars became involved with reforming Judaism, and Judaism experienced its first theoretical changes. A revolution in thinking

occurred with the establishment of the scientific study of Judaism, Die Wissenschaft des Judentums. This movement arose in nineteenth-century Germany and is especially associated with Abraham Geiger, a German rabbi, and Leopold Zunz, a German Jewish scholar, who conceived of a Judaism more congruent with contemporary philosophy and scientific knowledge. For Abraham Geiger and others, the purpose of their endeavors was to "bring the Jews into harmony with the age and the countries in which they live by means of a development proceeding from within."[1] These early Reformers were deeply attached to the religious tradition of Judaism. For example, Max Wiener stresses that Geiger's concern with the Judaism of his time was at the root of his work and philosophy:

> [Geiger] really believed he would be able to cure the ills of contemporary Judaism by a penetrating analysis of the sources of its spirit and of its evolution. More than any other proponent of the "Science of Judaism," Geiger was impelled by practical zeal and a driving desire to effect reforms. He listened to the voices of the ancient authorities because he was genuinely convinced that the heritage from the past should and could bear fruit in the present day. He believed in the genius of his people and in its vocation to lead Jewish men and women through all time. It was for this reason that he conceived of the "Science of Judaism" as not just an end in itself but as a guide to the construction of a living present and future.[2]

These Reform enthusiasts of "scientific knowledge" were convinced that, "given the historical facts, it would be possible to draw the correct practical conclusions with regard to the means by which their religion could best be served and elevated to the level of contemporary culture."[3]

Reformers argued that the historical, evolutionary nature of Judaism allowed for its continued growth. Because tradition was viewed as the historical record of a people's struggle for truth, that struggle was to be permitted to continue. New forms and

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[1]Ludwig Geiger, Geschichte der Juden in Berlin, cited in David Philipson, The Reform Movement in Judaism (New York, 1967), 29.
[2]Max Wiener, Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism: The Challenge of the Nineteenth Century (Cincinnati, 1981), 13-14.
[3]Ibid., 13.

thinking were welcomed as legitimate continuations of Jewish tradition. A tremendous potential for creativity was granted as a result of Die Wissenschaft des Judentums, for Reform found itself unfettered by the authority of the tradition.

Several of the European Reform rabbis, like Max Lielienthal, Isaac M. Wise, David Einhorn, Samuel Adler, and Samuel Hirsch, made their way to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. In the American climate, favorable, if not dedicated to progress and change, Reform flourished. It was, for the most part, German preachers who shaped the course of American congregations in the formative years of the early nineteenth century.[4] The present study will be limited to examination of issues related to the growth and development within the American Reform movement.

Background of the Problem

New conceptions of divine revelation and definition of the forms and ideals of Judaism allowed for creativity and innovation within Judaism. But this freedom also raised a multitude of questions and problems for the Reform movement. Jews were seen as responsible for shaping Judaism. Consequently, since its inception, the American Reform movement has been committed to self-analysis. Part of this analysis has been an on going attempt to determine the exact nature of Reform. Much of the thinking on this and other matters has been done by members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (the CCAR). The CCAR, formed in 1889, has historically been concerned with defining and determining the nature of Reform Judasim both theoretically and practically. Its questions have been: what are we? what do we do? what should we do? and why?

Reform has often been defined by the use of ideological terms, such as "prophetic", "liberal", "progressive", "open to change," "not bound by tradition." Concepts of God, revelation, authority, religious observance, social action, values, and priorities have

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[4]Philipson, The Reform Movement in Judaism, 329.

always been the subject of discussion among rabbis and lay members of the Reform movement. Reform has consistently held a fundamental and ideological commitment to intellectual freedom. The movement has historically been committed to the conscious combination of tradition, history, human development, human needs, and social and cultural influences in the process of shaping Judaism. As a result, each and every definition and concept mentioned in this paragraph has been the subject of considerable debate. Many of the issues have not yet been resolved, despite more than one hundred years of discussion.

A review of the official documents of the CCAR throughout its history (the proceedings of the annual conferences, its publications, and its platforms), shows that several issues have been repeatedly and consistently under discussion. These are all in some way related to the abolition of the belief in a literal, verbal, divine revelation. And therefore the rabbis have repeatedly argued divine authority versus individual authority. Related to this idea has been the question of the establishment of a (fixed) set of Reform beliefs.

Because of the Reform conceptualization of divine revelation, another major, and related, focus of the CCAR was the distinction between ethical/moral and ritual mitzvot. Ethical mitzvot were those that dictated values, moral behavior, and human relations. Ritual mitzvot required the observance of actual ceremonies or physical practices. The divinely created ethical mitzvot were generally considered eternally binding; ritual mitzvot, as the product of human beings, were designed for a particular time and place. No humanly designed practice could possibly be relevant for eternity. As Philipson said, "No one generation can legislate for all future ages."[5]

In addition, the members of the CCAR have attempted to determine the relevance of various traditional conceptions for Reform Jews. Specifically, the rabbis have debated

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[5]Ibid., 3.

the meaningfulness of "mitzvah" and "halachah" within Reform. There has been discussion over a definition of the term "mitzvah" itself, and if it is synonymous with, or related to, the term "halachah." The implications of this debate go far beyond mere linguistic preferences; they reflect profound religious principles.

From time to time, an institution of the American Reform movement has adopted a platform conveying its ideology. There have been three such pieces thus far, the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, the Columbus Platform, "The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism," in 1937, and the Centenary Perspective in 1976. Comparative analysis of these documents reveals a clear change in attitude with respect to the relative importance of ethical and ritual mitzvot. The official position of the Reform movement changed substantially in the 52 years intervening between the first two platforms. In Pittsburgh the rabbis rejected the binding nature of the ritual laws, but accepted the yoke of the moral mitzvot. The Columbus Platform, in contrast, obligated Reform Jews to both ritual and moral commandments. By 1976, the Reform rabbinate affirmed that Judaism (including Reform) emphasizes "action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life." Reform Jews are obligated to some type of daily religious observance, and Shabbat, holy day, and life cycle celebration. And most critically, a guide, the subject of nearly 100 years of controversy, was published by the CCAR in 1972. This first guide, relating to Shabbat observance, was followed in close succession by two others, one pertaining to life cycle events and the other to holiday celebration.

The Problem of the Present Study

The present study endeavors to chronicle and interpret the changes in attitude with respect to ritual mitzvot throughout the history of the American Reform movement. We concern ourselves with issues of authority, the nature of the Reform movement, definitions and understanding of "mitzvah" and "halachah," and the relative emphasis of religious practice in contrast to purely ethical imperatives.

Procedure

This study analyzes the issues presented above theologically, historically and psychologically. Primary sources include the "official" position(s) of the CCAR as revealed in its yearbooks (the record of the proceedings of the annual CCAR conventions), its publications (rabbi's manuals and guides to religious practice), and its platforms (the Pittsburgh and Columbus Platforms and the Centenary Perspective). In addition, Reform rabbis have written books and contributed articles on theoretical, practical and scholarly matters which are of interest to our study.

Secondary sources include books, theses and dissertations which deal with the CCAR, Reform Judaism and Reform Jewish thought. Related works dealing with other forms of American Judaism provide background information.

This thesis is organized into four chapters. The first is "Theology and Theory." In it we address the issues of God, revelation, halachah and mitzvah, authority, nature of Reform, and religious practice. The changing and diverse rationales given for both the rejection and affirmation of ritual mitzvot in American Reform Judaism is examined and interpreted.

Chapter Two, "From Theory to Practice," applies the principles gleaned from the theological analysis to the actual publications and platforms of the CCAR. These documents are analyzed to reveal their portrayal of, and consistency or inconsistency with, the theological principles of the movement at specific moments in its history. Religious and nonreligious factors outside of Reform Judaism which influence Reform thinking about the importance of ritual mitzvot are noted.

The third chapter, "Psychological Interpretations," seeks to understand the major attitudinal changes regarding the role of ritual mitzvot from a psychological viewpoint. Therefore, the psychological literature dealing with the dynamics of

cognitive consistency and attitude change is reviewed, and its conclusions applied to the problem under examination.

The thesis ends with "Final Remarks," providing a summary explanation of the entire phenomenon of the changing role of ritual mitzvot in American Reform Judaism over the course of its history.

Limitations

This study is concerned with recurring issues specifically related to the role of ritual mitzvot in American Reform Judaism. It is not intended to be a thorough history of the American Reform movement or of the CCAR. Nearly all Reform rabbis are members of the Conference, although not all contribute to committees or attend the annual conventions. The CCAR represents a consensus of Reform rabbis, but not a unanimous one. Surely, not all members agree with every "official" pronouncement of the CCAR. Because dissenting and minority opinions are frequently not noted in CCAR Yearbook entries, these positions may not be available for public knowledge.

Significance of the Study

There have been several histories of specific issues throughout particular time periods of the CCAR. A number of rabbinical and master's theses and several dissertations have addressed themselves to examinations of various aspects of the Reform movement. The following is a list of some of these: Kalman Levitan, "The Problem of Ritual and Practice in Reform Judaism"(1948); Milton Matz, "American Reform Judaism 1890-1937" (1952); Louis Youngerman, "The Jew in His American Environment, 1933-1955, as Evidenced in the Proceedings of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Rabbinical Assembly and the Rabbinical Council of America: A Psychological Study" (1958); Lawrence Siegel, "The Neo-Reform Growth of American Reform Judaism as Reflected in CCAR Yearbooks, 1942-1959" (1961);

Robert Scott, "The Transition from Classical Reform to Neo-Reform Judaism" (1966), Sylvin Wolf, "Reform Judaism as Process: A Study of The CCAR 1960-1975" (1978), and David Meyer, "Elements of the Return to Tradition in American Reform Judaism" (1986). To the best of my knowledge, however, none has attempted to survey the entire history of the Conference with respect to the role of ritual mitzvot in American Reform Judaism This study attempts to accomplish that task One unique aspect of the research presented here is the psychological analysis of the attitude changes with respect to the role of ritual mitzvot.

Chapter One

THEOLOGY AND THEORY

Throughout its history, various thinkers in the American Reform movement have published theological works. These writers have aligned themselves with the movement as rabbis and members of the CCAR and/or as professors at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Their works cover the entire range of what may loosely be termed "liberal" theology. They are liberal in the sense that none posits the theory of a Sinaitic Divine Revelation of both Written and Oral Law, immutable and eternal. Yet, they are in no other way homogeneous. As Alvin Reines has observed regarding the multiplicity of Jewish theologies, "All opinions are equally valid."[1] In this chapter we are primarily interested in the way these writers have understood the role and importance of ritual mitzvot, especially with respect to, or in comparison with, ethical mitzvot. We will also examine their writings to determine how they relate to mitzvot within the traditional Jewish theological triad of God-Torah-Israel. We will consider the following questions, although not all issues will be the concern of every author.

- What is the author's God-concept? Is God personal or non-personal?[2]
- What is the author's understanding of revelation?[3] What, if anything, is revealed by God?
- Who or what has authority for us? Who or what is the metzaveh? Do "k'lal Yisrael" or the institutions of the Reform movement have authority?
- What is the author's understanding of Written and Oral Law?

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[1]Alvin Reines, "God and Jewish Theology," in Bernard Martin, ed., Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought, (Chicago, 1968). 66.

[2]By "personal God" we mean a deity who is understood to be conscious of and caring for individuals--that is, a God somehow involved in human matters. A "non-personal God" is one who is unaffected by the experiences, needs and problems of people.

[3]Revelation will be understood here in its broadest sense as some form of communication by deity to humankind.

• Does the author define mitzvah? If so, how? What is his position regarding the role or importance of ritual mitzvot in comparison with ethical mitzvot? Does he address related issues such as halachah or minhag?

• How does this author compare with previous ones on various issues? Is his thinking evolutionary or revolutionary?

• How, if at all, is the writer influenced by contemporary theology or philosophy, psychology or sociology?

Before undertaking our chronological examination of several Reform theologians, we must first clarify our understanding of the distinction between ritual and ethical mitzvot. Jewish tradition distinguishes between two types of mitzvot--mitzvot bein adam l'makom and mitzvot bein adam l'chavero. The former category refers to laws regarding prayer, Shabbat, festivals, and life cycle events. These, therefore, have been termed "ritual" mitzvot. The latter group, understood as "ethical", regulates human interaction. While this distinction has existed within the Jewish tradition, traditional Judaism has not emphasized one category as more important than the other--Jews are expected to observe both. In addition, as has been frequently observed, it is often difficult to make a true distinction between the two. The introduction to the CCAR's 1979 publication Gates of Mitzvah (which deals primarily with ritual mitzvot) articulates the problem: "What mitzvah could be more elaborately ritualistic than the Passover Seder with its myriad details? But the purpose of the Seder is to teach a supreme ethical principle: that God created us to be free. Is the observance of Passover, then, a ritual or an ethical mitzvah?"[4] In this paper we will consider the content, rather than the purpose, of the mitzvah to determine its status, with the understanding that this distinction may at times appear arbitrary. In light of this definition, the seder would fall into the ritual category.

[4]Simeon J. Maslin, ed., Gates of Mitzvah: A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle (New York, 1979), 97.

Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900)

Isaac Mayer Wise was a man of extraordinary vision. He sought to unify all American Jews, both liberal and traditional, into one American Jewry. While this goal was not realized, Wise was responsible for the consolidation of the American Reform movement. He played a major role in the creation of its three key institutions: Hebrew Union College, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. These institutions, though bearing Wise's founding signature, soon drifted away from his theology and fell more into line with Kaufmann Kohler's thinking, as will become apparent in our subsequent discussions. The discussion will begin with Wise's conception of the nature of God and then proceed dicrectly to his understanding of revelation. This method reflects Wise's system of theology, in which revelation is central.

God

In his CCAR presidential address in 1891, Wise had this to say about God:

> Human reason can conceive no idea or ideal of deity superior to the Jehovah of Moses, the absolute being by whom and in whom the All exists, lives and perpetuates itself in its innumerable varieties of forms; who is in his manifestations, both in nature and history, absolute power, universal and sovereign, intellect supreme, love and begnignity, the only perfect being.[5]

Wise conceived of God as the highest ideal of moral perfection, the foundation of all ethics and morality. God, in holiness, demands our holiness.[6]

While these ideas may be understood to be describing a personal God, this was not the case. In fact, Wise's theology becomes complicated on this issue. Wise was very much influenced by the value of reason, as evidenced by his first words above ("Human reason can conceive. . .") and by his philosophical proofs for the existence

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[5]Isaac M. Wise, "President's Message," CCAR Yearbook (CCARYB), 1 (1891) : 17.
[6]Wise, "Introduction to the Theology of Judaism." Judaism at the World's Parliament of Religions (Cincinnati, 1894), 21.

of God. And, as a rationalist, Wise could not believe in the existence of miracles.[7] Critically, however, his rationality did not allow him to explain one truly miraculous event upon which he based his entire theological system--the Revelation to Moses at Sinai. Although Wise sincerely thought he did not believe in a personal God, he did firmly hold that a non-personal God, once and only once in history, spoke to a person. Yet, within the framework of Wise's thought, we cannot explain how this occurred.[8]

Revelation

In a speech before the World Parliament of Religions in 1894, Wise called God the "God of Revelation." Unlike any other of the liberal theologians included in the present study, Wise believed in a literal Sinaitic Revelation, which he would not allow to be influenced by the claims of biblical criticism. He said, "We know of God, His divine essence and nature, precisely what Moses told us and no more. . . ."[9]

Wise did not believe the entire Bible to be of perpetual and absolute truth. He held the principles alone were permanent, never to be discarded, whereas the embodiments might vary in accordance with the requirements and the spirit of the times." Thus, Wise conceived of a hierarchy of religious values with the Decalogue being of primary importance, followed by the sections of the Pentateuch based on the Decalogue and then by laws of a "specifically temporary character."[10] Wise believed that the only true revelation was the Decalogue. He contrasted the Decalogue with its subsequent extension and application, calling the former "unalterable" and the latter "national and temporal."[11] While accepting the developmental nature of Judaism,

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[7]James G. Heller, Isaac M. Wise, His Life, Work and Thought (New York, 1965), 533-535. Heller documents Wise' s case against the existence of miracles.

[8]Ralph Mecklenburger, "The Theologies of Isaac Mayer Wise and Kaufmann Kohler" (Rabbinic thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), 1972), 21 and 35.

[9]Cited in Andrew F. Key, The Theology of Isaac Mayer Wise (Cincinnati, 1962), 13.

[10]Ibid., 14-15.

[11]Heller, Wise, 522-523.

Wise considered all development subsequent to the Ten Commandments of Moses, including the prophetic and rabbinic literatures, "useful and instructive, but not definitive."[12] Wise found the validity for Reform in the Talmud itself, making both Reform and Talmud indispensable and inseparable: "Had we the power of the thunder we would proclaim it throughout the inhabited globe: There is no Judaism without progressive reforms, and there can be no reforms within the pale of Judaism without the Talmud."[13] This understanding formed the basis of Wise's philosophy of Reform Judaism: Judaism is a revealed religion, resting upon immutable theological and ethical doctrines, but permitting and even necessitating change and development.[14]

Wise's understanding of the Ten Commandments and its relation to Reform is summed up in this paragraph:

> Those based on the principles expressed in the Decalogue are the eternal laws, time and its revolutions affect them not, the progress of science and enlightenment improves them not, they are immutable like reason and justice themselves. Again, those laws not based upon the principles of the Decalogue are provisional laws which were enacted to suit a certain time and meet certain emergencies, but pass away with them.[15]

Thus, Wise conceived of mitzvot as unchangeable as they consisted of the decalogue and the ideas which emanated from it. This "eternal" legislation was "the only platform on which all Israelites can stand and, within the divine covenant, worship the Most High. . . ."[16] Mitzvot were distinguished from chukkim and mishpatim, those "provisional laws enacted to suit a certain time and meet certain emergencies." These laws pertained to the sacrificial cult, the Temple, and laws regarding the land. Wise claimed that "we know of no spiritual proof that Moses originally intended all that Levitical law and all the Levitical priesthood and institutions to be carried into Canaan

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[12]Ibid., 526.
[13]Ibid., 541.
[14]Ibid., 525.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid., 526.

and stand there forever. . . .We are forced to the conclusion the Levitical laws of Moses were not intended to be eternally obligatory."[17] So, while it is clear that Wise held the Talmud and other rabbinic literature in high regard, as it did reflect the spirit of the Decalogue, he did not see it as "Oral Law." He did not understand it to be a continuation of the revelation at Mt. Sinai, but rather an extension of it. He did not feel bound by its legislation as he did by the divinely revealed Decalogue.

Regarding the possibility of the stagnation of ritual if left unchanged too long, Wise stated:

> All forms, to which no meaning is attached any longer, are an impediment to our religion and must be done away with . . . Whatever makes us ridiculous before the world as it now is, may safely be and should be abolished . . . Whatever tends to the elevation of the divine service, to inspire the heart of the worshiper and attract him, should be done without any unnecessary delay . . . Whenever religious observances and the just demands of civilized society exclude each other, the former have lost their power. . . . Religion is intended to make man happy, good. . . .[18]

In an article in the 1865 American Israelite (for which Wise served as editor and chief writer), Wise listed the rituals he felt should be eliminated. All of those mentioned were what he called "unbiblical" and, therefore, contained "foreign ideas." The list included the celebration of the second day of festivals, the lulav, the Megillah, hand washing, aliyot, and the kashering of meat. In another American Israelite article he declared tefillin and mezuzah to be literal applications of "that which was obviously intended to be taken metaphorically."[19]

Thus Wise did believe in the necessity of Judaism changing with respect to forms. He did not consider the "re-forms" of Reform, nor Reform Judaism itself, however, as a departure in any way from traditional "Orthodox" Judaism. Thus, Wise was adamantly opposed to the radical reformers of his time who would do away with everything

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[17]Ibid., 527.
[18]Ibid., 559.
[19]Ibid., 564-565.

> Who are we, what right have we to obliterate the spiritual gifts of these men of God, those princes of peace, those mighty men of righteousness? Evidently none! All that is left for us to do is simply to ascertain what of all that is ordained was intended for all eternity and all mankind, and what was intended originally for a certain age or country. This is all that reformers are permitted to do. You dare not destroy other people's property.[20]

For Wise the limits of what Reform could modify were set by the Bible, "beyond which the Jewish reformer can not and dare not go."[21] Beause there are so many ways of interpreting the Bible, and because Wise accepts neither the totality of the Bible nor any of the post-Biblical literature as authoritative, Wise's statement is problematic. That is, in reality, exactly how may the limits be set?

Liberal Jews have, almost by definition, denied the literal authority of Jewish tradition on their lives. Having done this, however, they are faced with the dilemma of what, if anything, does have authority for them. Debate on this issue is as old as the movement itself. In the early years, the discussion revolved around the idea of a synod and/or a creed which would be binding for Reform Jews. Later, Reform thinkers addressed themselves to the same question, but debated the appropriateness of Reform guides to religious practice. The synod was Isaac M. Wise's answer to authority in Jewish life. He thought of it as "a method of regularizing change, of giving to reinterpretations of the law a halachic sanction, of pursuing in broad outline the processes of classical rabbinic days."[22] Wise desired the decisions to be by consensus (ideally unanimous) and approved on the basis of Jewish tradition. This would increase uniformity and decrease anarchy, two important considerations for a man deeply committed to unity among Jews. Wise repeatedly urged the CCAR to produce a systematic theology of Judaism, an authoritative statement of Jewish

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[20]Ibid., 562.
[21]Ibid., 560.
[22]Ibid., 572.

doctrine. In fact, in a presidential address, Wise suggested that his own systematic theology would serve as a good starting point toward this end.[23]

It is true that Wise's theology was influential in the early years of the Reform movement. This is especially so because, as professor of theology at HUC, Wise surely taught his own thinking. It is also true, however, that Wise's ideas, like those of all modern thinkers, reflect the general thinking of the times. As such, it has been suggested that Wise was particularly influenced by some contemporaneous liberal Protestant theologians. James Heller relates that Wise attended church services every week in Albany to listen to the sermons.[24] In addition, he once spoke about what he perceived to be the very substantial similarities between Judaism and Unitarinaism.[25]

Summary

It is clear that the theology of Isaac Mayer Wise rests firmly on two principles: his understanding of revelation, and his fierce desire for unity among American Jews. The Decalogue, the only product of revelation, stands eternal. It, and the ideas which flow directly from it, are the only mitzvot in Judaism. All other legislation is subject to change and reform, provided these modifications remain within the limits set by the Decalogue (and parts of the Bible) and by reason. Any such changes, however, do not indicate a break with the principles, doctrines, or precepts of traditional Judaism. Wise advocated a synod to strengthen Reform through the establishment of a central authority which would assure that changes be in full consonance with Jewish tradition.

The ideas expressed by Isaac M. Wise have been basic to Reform Judaism and have provided the impetus for endless discussion throughout its history. And yet, as

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[23]Isaac M. Wise, "President's Annual Message," CCARYB, 4 (1894) : 28-29.
[24]Heller, Wise, 136.
[25]Isaac M. Wise, Reminiscences (Cincinnati, 1901), 138.

American Reform Judaism entered its "Classical" period, the very institutions founded by Isaac Mayer Wise were nonetheless soon influenced more by the thinking of another, more radical thinker, a rabbi, scholar, and "Classical Reformer" by the name of Kaufmann Kohler.[26]

Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926)

If the priority in the program of Isaac M. Wise could be identified as "First Unity and then Liberty," then that of David Einhorn, the spiritual father (and father-in-law) of Kaufmann Kohler, was "First Truth and then Peace."[27] Kohler was influenced by the latter ideology, "first" by his zealous scientific study of the Jewish texts, "and then" by his attempt to unify the Reform rabbinate by calling the Pittsburgh Conference in 1885. As chief contributor to the contents of the Pittsburgh Platform, Kohler formulated theological ideas that guided the Reform movement until at least 1937 when the second Reform platform was adopted. It would not be an exaggeration, however, to assert that Kohler's influence may still be felt today, both in the attitudes and preferences of many members of Reform congregations and as remnants in some "official" Reform thinking.

Kohler's doctoral dissertation, entitled Jacob's Blessing, used the critical method of biblical analysis to analyze Genesis, chapter 49. In his work, Kohler revealed the prophetic elements included within the Pentateuchal text. His introduction linked this finding with his conception of the nature of Judaism. He pointed to the shortcomings

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[26]Isaac Mayer Wise was not himself a Classical Reformer. Jacob R. Marcus has defined Classical Reform as the type of Judaism which came about in the United States as a result of the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. Wise was not instrumental in the formulation of the Platform, yet was an important leader during this period. In contrast, Neo-Reform, as defined by Marcus, describes the Reform which was officially born with the Columbus Platform in 1937. Both of these definitions are found in Robert M. Scott, "The Transition from Classical Reform to Neo-Reform Judaism" (Rabbinic thesis, HUC-JIR, 1966), 2.

[27]Robert J. Marx, "Kaufmann Kohler as Reformer" (Rabbinic thesis, HUC-JIR, 1951), 13-14.

of a religion enmeshed in the past and pleaded for a living religion which adapted to the needs of the present. Beginning with the critical approach to the Pentateuch, Kohler concluded that Judaism was ever-growing and evolving. This led him to his formulation of Israel's Mission: just as Judaism evolves and grows, so does its concept of its Mission.[28] These concepts, the evolving nature of Judaism and the Mission of Israel, constituted the central ideas of Kohler's theology. Kohler presented his theological ideas in his magnum opus, Jewish Theology: Systematically and Historically Considered. He divided the book into three sections, dealing respectively with "God, man, and Israel." Kohler's conscious departure from the usual Jewish triad of God-Torah-Israel, reveals his conception of the human fulfillment of the Mission as the link between God and Israel. We are particularly interested here in his ideas about God, revelation, and authority.

God

Like Wise, Kohler was a rationalist. Unlike Wise, however, Kohler did not attempt to prove the existence of God by means of a philosophical proof. He knew that metaphysical proofs for God's existence had been "outlawed" since Kant.[29] Because Kohler maintained that faith must never conflict with reason, he wrote that it was reasonable to believe in God. It followed logically and rationally, then, that Kohler should believe in God, and he did.[30]

The God in whom Kohler believed was omniscient and omnipotent. More importantly, we know that Kohler's God was moral, sometimes called "holy." From his Jewish Theology we know that Kohler believed that God could be known only through ethics. God was the standard of moral perfection, of holiness, which Kohler called

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[28]Ibid., 5-7.
[29]Kaufmann Kohler, Jewish Theology: Systematically and Historically Considered (New York, 1918. Reprinted by Ktav with an introduction by Joseph H. Blau, 1968). 65.
[30]Ibid., 31.

"purity unsullied by any breath of evil."[31] These notions led Kohler directly into his Mission of Israel ideas. Kohler's conception of God as the standard and the example of excellence suggested to Kohler that God was unity. And God's unity "brings harmony into nature and history, which are united under one all-encompassing moral plan."[32]

Revelation

Kohler believed in one God who revealed the Torah. The very pattern of his book, Jewish Theology, reveals his undersanding of the evolutionary nature of that revelation, as he traces the historical development of ideas, showing that Judaism is still developing and will continue to develop as long as it is vital:

> In my opinion the Jewish religion has never been static, fixed for all time by an ecclesiastical authority, but has ever been and still is the result of a dynamic process of growth and development. . . .[33]

Kohler believed strongly in the progressive character of revelation, considering it "as a continuous force in shaping and reshaping the Jewish faith" and defining "Torah" as "the Jewish lore in its continuous process of growth and evolution."[34]

The continuing nature of revelation meant that revelation did not imply or demand creed: "Judaism lays all stress upon conduct, not confession; upon a hallowed life, not a hollow creed. . . . There is no Biblical or Rabbinic precept, 'Thou shalt believe!'. . .To the rabbis, the 'root' of faith is the recognition of a divine Judge to whom we owe account for all our doings."[35] To Kohler, revelation consisted of the "spirit of God" rather than the communication of a specific body of information which God was alleged to have

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[31] Ibid., 101.
[32] Ibid., 84.
[33] Ibid., viii.
[34] Joseph H. Gumbiner, "Kaufmann Kohler's Approach to the Problem of Revelation," in CCAR Journal (CCARJ), 8 (October 1960) : 13.
[35] Kohler, Jewish Theology, 20.

written or dictated. Kohler recognized this as a living spirit which continued to be revealed through human beings as they confront the Biblical text.[36]

Kohler's link between God, revelation, and humanity was ethics. Consciousness and knowledge of God stirred up the human conscience and kept people from doing wrong things. They "keep society in order and prompt the individual to walk in the path of duty." The main purpose for the divine revelation at Sinai was to "put the fear of God into the hearts of the people, lest they sin." (Exodus 20:20) The recognition of God was the moral power of life.[37] Here again we see the influence of the philosopher Kant on Kaufmann Kohler. Kant, says Kohler, has shown us:

> that we can know God's existence only through ethics, as a postulate of our moral nature. The inner consciousness of our moral obligation, or duty, implies a moral order of life, or moral law: and this, in turn, postulates the existence of God, the Ruler of life, who assigns to each of us his task and his destiny.[38]

Revelation, then, existed to lead humankind back to the God it had deserted and to restore to all a primal consciousness of God, with its power of moral regeneration.[39]

Jewish ethics, defined by Kohler, was:

> to walk in the ways of God. . . . .What Scripture means is that man should emulate God. As He clothes the naked, nurses the sick, comforts the sorrowing, and buries the dead, so should man. (Deuteronomy 13:5) In other words, human life must take its pattern from the divine goodness and holiness.[40]

Kohler held to the principle of the centrality of ethics in revelation throughout his lifetime. In his farewell sermon as president of HUC delivered in 1921, Kohler stated:

> There is but one lofty ideal to fashion our lives: 'Be holy, as I the Lord your God, am holy!' Severed from religion, ethics is a tree cut off from its roots, and social justice but vapor and vanity without the God of

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[36]Gumbiner, Kaufmann Kohler, 12.
[37]Marx, Kaufmann Kohler, 29.
[38]Kohler, Jewish Theology, 69.
[39]Marx, Kaufmann Kohler, 30.
[40]Kohler, Jewish Theology, 479-480.

> righteousness by whom the springs of action are weighed in the scales.[41]

Kohler held that morality and religion were inseparably united in the revelation at Sinai: it was at Sinai that the free moral relationship of humankind to God was revealed.[42] As receivers of revelation, human beings aquired the responsibility of acting as mediators between God and the world. In particular, Israel served as the mediator between God and humanity. This led Kohler to his most frequently-stated message, that of the Mission of Israel. Kohler was very much a universalist in his thinking that Judaism had a message for all. But at the same time he was a particularist, holding that different peoples had different geniuses. The Jews' particular genius was for discovering the way of life which all peoples should adopt. This idea may have been the product of the then popular "ethnic psychology" which maintained that the Jewish people had a unique capacity for receiving revelation, and that this Jewish genius could be seen unfolding in history.[43] It is also likely that Kohler was influenced here by the thinking of Abraham Geiger. Israel had a universal message for the world, and it was Israel's particular task, its Mission, to make that message known. The Mission was Israel's "raison d'etre." Kohler stressed that "there can be no disputing the fact that the central idea of Judaism and its life purpose is the doctrine of the One Only and Holy God, whose Kingdom of truth, justice and peace is to be universally established at the end of time. . . . Israel's Mission is to defend, to unfold and to propagate this truth.[44] The truth, in Kohler's view, "lays claim, not to perfection, but to perfectibility."[45]

Reform Jews had a distinct role in the Mission. The task of progressive Judasim was in re-emphasizing Israel's world-Mission and reclaiming for Judasim its place as the priesthood of humanity. It was, he claimed, "to proclaim anew the prophetic idea of

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[41]Gumbiner, Kaufmann Kohler, 15.
[42]Kohler, Jewish Theology, 477.
[43]Gumbiner, Kaufmann Kohler, 16.
[44]Kohler, Jewish Theology, 15.
[45]Ibid., 18.

God's covenant with humanity, whose force had been lost, owing to inner and outer obstacles. . . .It must outlast all other religions in its certainty that ultimately there can be but the one religion, uniting God and man by a single bond."[46] To this end, Kohler recommended that the mission work be done through

> well organized Jewish literature and press which spread the Jewish truths broadcast over the land, and, entering every Jewish household, foster Jewish life, awaken Jewish sentiment and train the Jewish minds and hearts. . . . We require a well-equipped army to besiege the barren and low-aiming everyday-life of the Jew and force it to surrender to the ideals, presented by the lofty aspirations of enlightened religion. . . . We ought to have regular publications and distributions of Jewish pamphlets or tracts. . . .[47]

In a paper read before the CCAR Conference in 1893, Kohler stated his vision clearly and passionately:

> Here on the boundary of the Messianic land we must stand with the Ark of the Covenant upon our shoulders, waiting til our brethren can join us in entering the land where the prophetic vision will be realized: one God , one humanity. . . .[48]

This universalism became one of the basic touchstones necessary for the understanding of the thinking of this period. And, ultimately it emerged as a critical point for discussion and debate in the movement.

Kohler's universalistic ideals affected his thinking about ritual mitzvot. Because of their role in the Mission of Israel, the moral statutes of the Torah were considered unchangeable and perpetually binding. But it was not enough for Jews to be merely the vessels of the universal ideas which would bring on the Messianic age. So Judaism developed "forms" and institutions--what we have been calling ritual mitzvot. Jewish customs helped the Jews guard against absorption by the multitude of nations, thereby allowing for preservation of the precious heritage of peace and truth and justice. Jews

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[46] Ibid., 51.

[47] Authentic Report of the Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Platform, in Jacob, The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect, 96-97.

[48] Kaufmann Kohler, "Is Reform Judaism Destructive or Constructive?" CCARYB, 3 (1893) : 114.

of each age required new forms, however, suitable to their particular set of circumstances. The universality, the eternality, of an idea, then, determined its identity as a reflection of the revelation of the divine spirit.

The Oral Law--Mishnah and Talmud--fell short of achieving this essential quality of universality because it failed to give ethics the prominent place Kohler felt they deserved. The Oral Law did not stress ethics in the same manner as expressed in the prophetic and wisdom literature of the Bible, and it failed even to attempt to formulate a system of ethics.[49]

Like Wise, however, Kohler was not anti-Talmud. He felt there was a wealth of spiritual and ethical thought buried in the Talmud. Its laws had outlived their usefulness and were in desperate need of revitalization. Kohler did not lay blame on the Talmud itself, but rather on the rigidity of the Orthodox for preserving laws which were no longer timely or useful.[50] Ceremonies valid in one age may well be unacceptable in another. Therefore, Kohler found it necessary to

> ascertain the origin and purpose of each and every ceremony in order to find out whether by appealing to our minds and hearts it fulfills a religious function or whether it has become an empty shell with the kernel gone.[51]

Kohler termed this reliance on past forms of Judaism "Orientalism," and called it "the weakness of the synagogue." This was of utmost concern for Kohler because it "separated the Jewish community from the surrounding world to such an extent that it could no longer exert an influence to win outsiders for its great truths." It was the task of Reform Jews to "brush off the dust of the ages and discover anew the real meaning of Jewish life and of Jewish ceremonies, thereby investing Judaism with new dignity and self-respect.[52]

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[49] Kohler, Jewish Theology, 481.
[50] Marx, Kohler, 53-54.
[51] Kaufmann Kohler, "The History and Function of Ceremonies in Judaism," CCARYB, 17 (1907) : 205.
[52] Kohler, Jewish Theology, 470-471.

It is clear that Kohler did hold a place, an important place, for ritual mitzvot. While he leveled some harsh criticism at rituals in his earlier writings, as the years passed he became more convinced of the necessity of meaningful ceremonial practices. He did not, however, stray from the idea that only those rituals which added to the significance of one's religious life should be maintained.

Summary

Many of the differences noted between Isaac Mayer Wise and Kaufmann Kohler may be traced to their divergent backgrounds. Wise preceded Kohler to the United States, and remained uninfluenced by the European tradition of historical criticism. Contrarily, much of Kohler's theology was the product of his early exposure to higher biblical criticism. Wise accepted more of tradition than did Kohler. While Wise still believed in the infallible revelation of the Decalogue (albeit giving that distinction to it alone), Kohler could not believe in a literal, verbal revelation for any text. Wise's certainty also allowed him to attempt to prove the existence of God; Kohler could not. Yet they both agreed that God was the orderer and ruler of the universe and the source of all truth. Their differences may at least in part be attributed to Kohler's greater sophistication, better education, and a broader base of knowledge and thought. Both men justified change by noting that Judaism had always changed. In this way they were equally divergent from traditional Jewish attitudes toward constancy.

Very importantly, both Wise and Kohler valued morality above all other Jewish teachings, although Kohler went beyond Wise by virtually equating Judaism with the pursuit of moral ends. Universalism was a very important part of the theologies of both Wise and Kohler. To Wise, Jews were Jews by religion only. Therefore, nothing should remain in Judaism which was not of universal application. The mission of Israel involved being dispersed, by God, to carry the truth to the nations.[53] Similarly, Kohler

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[53]Heller, Wise, 597.

maintained that the Mission of Israel would culminate in universal peace, brought about by the ethical teachings of Judaism.

Isaac Mayer Wise taught theology at HUC from 1887 until the year of his death. Kaufmann Kohler began teaching theology in 1905 and continued until his retirement in 1922. In 1923 a new member of the faculty was appointed to take over as professor of theology, Samuel Cohon, called "perhaps the central theological figure in Reform Judaism"[54] of his day. Cohon's influence in the Reform movement was indeed significant. He molded much of the Union Prayer Books of 1940 and 1945. He created both the Union Haggadah (1923) and the Rabbi's Manual (1928). Most importantly, he was the chief framer of the Columbus Platform of 1937.

Samuel S. Cohon (1888-1959)

The Classical period of Reform, characterized by reason, decorum, and radicalism with respect to ritual and Jewish tradition, eased into a period known as the Neo-Reform period. This period represented a substantial return to tradition. Historian Michael Meyer described the transition this way:

> At that time [the Classical period] the movement was largely limited to German Jews, heavily under the influence of German philosophy, and opposed to any form of Jewish nationalism. It stressed Judaism, but not Jewishness; religion, not peoplehood. Wedded to reason in theology and broad ethical injunctions in practice, it purposely neglected Jewish mysticism and ritual law. It was concerned with delineating as clearly as possible the contrast which it afforded the prevailing Orthodoxy from which it had sprung. But today it presents a very different image. The heritage of German Reform has itself been reshaped. The need to stress characteristics which differentiate Reform from Orthodoxy has given way to a desire for finding common ground. The excessive penchant for reason and decorum has been replaced by a greater appreciation of emotion and free expression.[55]

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[54]Michael A. Meyer, "Samuel S. Cohon: Reformer of Reform Judaism," Judaism, 15 (Summer 1966): 319.
[55]Ibid.

The large influx of Eastern European Jews to the United States beginning in 1881gradually affected Reform Judaism. By 1928 three and a half of the four million Jews in the United States were of Eastern European birth or descent, most of them here less than 50 years. Thus, Samuel Cohon (an Eastern European) was both a student and admirer of Kaufmann Kohler (German) but had a substantially different religious outlook. In ways that may be characteristic of Eastern European immigrants, he was much more sympathetic to tradition, emotion, and particularism. He valued Jewish folkways, music and Hebrew. He desired more emotion and less decorum in the religious service. And, aware of the Reform movement's separatist tendencies, he sought to "reunite it with neglected segments of the Jewish past and with the Jewish community as a whole in the present."[56] Cohon adapted the Reform of the nineteenth century to meet the specific challenges of the twentieth.

Samuel Cohon's posthumously published book, Jewish Theology, is similar to Kohler's in that it traces issues historically on the basis of Jewish sources, gives more contemporary conceptions, and ends by offering his own views. Cohon did not attempt to force Judaism into categories derived from other religions and philosophies, which had been done in the nineteenth century with what he called "grotesque results." He therefore based his theology not on any specific philosophical system, but rather on the "religious experience of the individual, specifically in the consciousness of the sacred."[57]

God

Cohon's systematic work Jewish Theology contains an entire section on the doctrine of God in Judaism. It traces historical understandings of the ways to God, Jewish proofs for the existence of God, and many versions of the attributes of God, as well as an

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[56]Ibid.
[57]Ibid., 321.

uncompleted section on modern arguments for the existence of God. The book does not contain a section delineating Cohon's God concept, although we may glean this information from his signed "A Jew's Creed," which appears at the beginning of the book. In this creed, Cohon states his personal beliefs, including the following declaration of his God concept:

> I believe in the reality of the living God, who while transcending time and space, dwells and works in all things at all times. He is the Source of all being and the Father and Master of all men.[58]

This statement reveals that Cohon's God is eternal and both transcendent and immanent. God is also the creator and ruler of all things.

Revelation

Cohon argued that the traditional view of revelation required radical restatement. He said that critical biblical study shattered the belief that the Pentateuch was communicated supernaturally to Moses at Sinai as a final deposit of truth for all times. Contemporary biblical scholarship reveals the text to be the product of Israel's spiritual creativity in the course of many centuries. Therefore, not all of its contents are of equal value and permanence. "Modern criticism clears the way for the investment of the Bible with new power. It shows religion as a progressive quest on the part of man after God and His ways."[59] Cohon makes two references to revelation in his creed:

> I believe that God reveals Himself in the cosmic order and in the life, mind, and spirit of man.
>
> I believe that God's revelation to the prophets of Israel and of other peoples, offers a light for all men in their spiritual and moral striving.[60]

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[58]Samuel S. Cohon, "A Jew's Creed," Jewish Theology (Assen, The Nethlerlands, 1971), xiv.
[59]Ibid., 131-132.
[60]Ibid., xiv.

The notion of progressive revelation to which Cohon subscribed, leads to the important interaction between humankind and God, and to the Mission of Israel concept.

> The belief that revelation takes place in history has kept Judaism from becoming static. In place of merely preserving and transmitting the divine knowledge from generation to generation as a fixed deposit, Judaism has modified, corrected and extended it, out of growing experience. . . . Revelation means something more than the theophany at Sinai or in the Temple. . . . Revelation reflects man's confrontation of God, to which he responds with a loving heart and receptive and eager mind. . . . As the disclosure of the divine will and purpose to inspired minds, revelation is basic to contemporary as to Biblical religion. Vital faith is born in souls that have been touched by the divine fire and charged with a mission and message to their age. As from the heart of reality, a light breaks forth and kindles the minds of the elect, who become God's servants and spokesmen to their fellowmen.[61]

While one of the statements in the above-mentioned creed suggests that members of all religions are eligible to receive prophecy, Cohon assigned Jews the responsibility of Mission: "I believe it is Israel's mission to continue to witness to God before all men."[62] In this respect, Cohon agreed with both Kohler and Wise. He differed from them in his conception of the human role in the mission. Both Kohler and Wise gave Jews the responsibility of spreading God's word. Cohon, however, stressed "confrontation." He saw more of an interaction between human beings and God.

In Cohon's analysis, progressive revelation is tied to religious practice. He stresses the evolutionary nature of Judaism, and sees Judaism as the balance of belief, ethical ideals and conduct, and of ceremonial observance throughout history:

> Judaism is not a static faith. . . . A religion that ignores life, is ignored by life. Progress is the condition of existence. When progress stops, stagnation and death set in. . . . Voluntarily and joyously we must receive our heritage of faith, and commit ourselves to its blessed burden of discipline, by which to translate our beliefs and convictions into acts of worship and observance.[63]

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[61] Ibid., 140-142.

[62] Ibid., xiv.

[63] Samuel S. Cohon, What We Jews Believe and A Guide to Jewish Practice (Assen, 1971), p. 148.

This emphasis on the totality of Jewish life is where Cohon parted company with Classical Reformers like Kaufmann Kohler. Classical Reform was too rational and too radical for Cohon. He believed that Judaism consisted of, and therefore required, forms and symbols. Such things bring holiness into life and give concrete expression to the sacred. Consequently, within Reform he became the exponent of a revaluation of Halachah and of the traditional mode of prayer.[64] We will note his special influence and contribution to the Columbus Platform in Chapter Two. Conceived primarily by Cohon, it both reflected and influenced Reform Jewish practice and thought until 1976 when the movement adopted its Centenary Perspective.

Authority

Cohon was particularly concerned with raising the level of Reform Jewish observance. But he was also dedicated to the formulation of a "creed." He did not accept the "deed or creed" debate because he thought that both were necessary: " . . . without religious convictions, beliefs, or creed, there can be no religious deeds."[65] In an article in the 1936 Hebrew Union College Annual, Cohon proclaimed,

> Reform Judaism has unmistakably tended toward the establishment of standards of its own, even though it began by breaking away from certain fixed forms. While it found the Šulhan 'Aruk inoperative under the changed conditions of Jewish life in western lands, it has not abandoned all law, ritual, and ceremony. On the contrary, it finds them essential to the preservation of Judaism as a force in the lives of men. If each individual is not to be a law to himself, he must learn to follow standards not of his making. . . . Reform presents a revised view of authority. . . . As in all former phases of Judaism so in Reform two factors enter into the nature of authority: (a) the needs of the Jewish people, and (b) their attitude to the Divine as expressed in their conceptions of revelation and tradition.[66]

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[64]Meyer, Cohon, 321-322.
[65]Cohon, Jewish Theology, 90.
[66]Cohon, "Authority in Judaism," Hebrew Union College Annual, XI (1936) : 640-641.

Cohon's conception here is that Reform requires laws and standards. This is not Orthodoxy, however, because Reform does not support its claims the same way Orthodoxy does, proving the will of God by the citation of Scriptural verses.

Cohon uses the word "mitzvot" to describe "deeds which religion requires for its proper functioning." He understands these to be divine commands. However, Cohon believes that individuals are their own ultimate authorities:

> The needs of the spiritual life of our day. . . have grown too complicated to be readily confined by the Halachah. At the same time, it is clear that the rich heritage of the past offers much that is useful. Its customs, forms, and ceremonies serve us as models and as guides. We must, of course, carefully choose those which can enrich rather than obstruct our spiritual strivings today. Our purpose must not be to restore to practice picturesque antiquities suitable for a museum, but to select the vital elements that can be replanted to become fruitful in our lives. . . .We must turn our spiritual heritage into a personal possession.[67]

Summary

Samuel Cohon has been identified here as the first significant Reform theologian to help direct the movement away from its Classical persona. While it is unwise to attribute motivation for another's actions, we may presume that Cohon responded to the desires of congregants as well as to his own theological and esthetic sensibilities. Surely the same may be said of both Wise and Kohler. It is clear that Cohon was more sympathetic to ritual within Reform Judaism, but the real difference may be where each author was willing to "draw the line" regarding precisely should have been termed a "picturesque antiquity." It is instructive to note, and this will become apparent in our analysis of the platforms in Chapter Two, that both Kohler and Cohon advocated maintaining only those ceremonies and practices which enabled Jews to sanctify their lives. Likewise, Wise eliminated observances which might cause embarrassment to those engaging in them.

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[67]Cohon, What We Jews Believe, 147-149.

Wise's authority remained with God, as long as the issue in question derived from the Ten Commandments. He also believed than unity among Jews required the retention of a certain level of religious observance. Kohler circularly reasoned that the observation of Jewish law protected Jews from any influencing factors in their environment and consequently preserved Jewish tradition. Kohler placed authority with this protective nature of Jewish tradition. Yet, he highly regarded individual choice. Cohon, while advocating autonomy, stressed that Reform Jews must know what was required of them. Cohon did compile a guide to Reform religious practice, which was published only after his death. The next authors to be considered here, Frederic Doppelt and David Polish, also believed in rabbinical guidance, and consequently published a guide to religious practice in 1957.

Frederic Doppelt and David Polish

While a full analysis of the work A Guide for Reform Jews will be undertaken in Chapter Two, the authors' understanding of mitzvah and authority are relevant to the present discussion. These conceptions are linked to their ideas about God and revelation, and thus will be considered here together.

The authors recognized the reality of self-authority in liberal religion, and therefore did not intend their work to be anything other than a guide for those who felt the need for it. They did, however, note that once a Jew took the assumptions and the discipline of their guide seriously, and sought to live by them, s/he thereby made them authoritative in his/her life.[68] And, a guide was required because complete religious laissez-faire was seen to have failed in the past. The result of the extreme individualism of the Reform movement was that "Reform Judasim has been equated with minimal Judaism in the eyes of many; and to some, being a Reform Jew came to be synonymous with doing nothing about Judaism--all of which tended to sap the strength

[68]Frederic Doppelt and David Polish, A Guide for Reform Jews (New York, 1957), 40-41.

of Reform as a way of life."[69] The establishment of certain basic principles was deemed necessary in order to avoid both "complete disregard for Jewish observance and arbitrary and ill-conceived practices. . . ."[70]

The Doppelt and Polish guide was predicated on a mitzvah system. The authors believed that mitzvot were imperatives born of the Jews' "spiritual rendezvous" with God. That is, they were to be determined neither by scientific surveys nor by the consensus of the general Jewish population: The only criterion was "whether the Mitzvot we are to keep constitute spiritual moments in Jewish history when the Jewish people came upon God."[71] For Doppelt and Polish Jewish observance reflects a Jewish conception of history. That is, certain events in Israel's history have been interpreted by Jews as encounters with God. The two major examples of such divine intervention were the Exodus from Egypt and the Revelation at Sinai. These events resulted in Israel establishing a covenant with God. Thus, Jewish tradition speaks of zecher litziat Mitzrayim and zecher l'matan Torah. In addition, many moments in the life of the Jew are intimately related to Israel's historical career: the mitzvot surrounding birth, circumcision, naming, education, marriage and death all take on added meaning because in each case the individual is made conscious of his/her own unique role in Jewish history. Much of the symbolism of Jewish ceremony is based upon the summons of Israel to remember the spiritual roots of its being.[72]

Doppelt and Polish note that the values of kedushah and mitzvah are linked together in the formulaic blessing recited before the enactment of a mitzvah, "asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav. . . ." The connection of these values suggested a third concept to the authors:

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[69] Ibid., 8.
[70] Ibid., 10.
[71] Ibid., 41.
[72] Ibid., 17-18.

> that individuals and groups attain sanctity only upon responding to the divine imperative--'Who has sanctified us through his commandments.' A mitzva or an observance then becomes man's way of responding to many concurrent spiritual needs. He responds to God. He preserves the covenant relationship. He affirms the holiness of his own personal and corporate life. . . . And he derives these insights from the historical experiences of his people. The observance of Shabbat, Festivals and Holidays, as well as his personal regimen, recall hallowed moments in his people's career.[73]

Observance of mitzvot allows Jews to renew their covenantal relationship with God. Thus, the Guide to Reform Jewish Practice authored by Doppelt and Polish outlines a system for the observance of mitzvot. A mitzvah is defined as "a spiritual entity in itself which immortalizes primarily an historic relationship to God which the Jewish people experienced in the course of its history. . . . it flows from an historically spiritual moment when our people confronted God; and every time we enact the mitzva, we are re-enacting that spiritual moment of our history in our own times and are renewing it in our own lives as Jews."[74]

The authors then identify halachah as the "way one should go--specifically, as the accepted ways in which one should proceed to do the mitzvot." Their determination in each generation rests with the rabbinical authorities who attempt to apply the principles of mitzvah. The only authority of halachah is the consensus of the community, "but once it is in common usage, it remains in force as the religious way in which one should walk until such time when it is changed or substituted by the same democratic process through which it was established as the Halacha in Jewish life."[75] A third stream of Jewish observance, subsidiary to mitzvot, was also included in the guide. These are called minhagim--folk-ways invented by the people themselves. Thus each mitzvah has its own associated halachot and minhagim, "all three of which flow from the well-springs of Jewish life."[76]

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[73]Ibid., 18-19.
[74]Ibid., 34.
[75] Ibid., 41-42.
[76]Ibid., 46.

Summary

Doppelt and Polish were among the first to commit themselves in writing to a system for Reform Jewish life. In addition, they introduced traditional Jewish vocabulary into Reform, which was eventually adopted by the CCAR committee on religious practice and incorporated into the guides produced by it. Jakob J. Petuchowski, rabbi, theologian, and professor of theology at HUC, goes even further by recognizing divine revelation and declaring Torah as authoritative.

Jakob J. Petuchowski

It is difficult to label Petuchowski's theology, partly because that is his intention. He is German born, which might suggest a fairly radical position, were he to align himself with co-patriots such as Kaufmann Kohler. But Petuchowski is from another generation, and, as he states in the preface to his book Ever Since Sinai, he does not want to be "pigeon-holed" as an adherent of any of the modern Jewish movements--Orthodox, Conservative or Reform. His work is rather traditional; he deals with the doctrines of God, Election, Revelation, and both the Oral and Written Law. He suggests that his book be considered "a phenomenology of Torah." Petuchowski's stated challenge in Ever Since Sinai is to reconcile scholarship and belief.[77] He is concerned with the meaning which Torah can have for the modern Jew.

God

Petuchowski's discussion of God stems from the Shema, in which Jews proclaim that Adonai is their one God. He describes various historical and philosophical understandings of God, which led him to his premise: there is only one reality of God although we experience God in different ways, all necessary and important. Thus, at different times in our lives we will encounter the philosophical "God of Aristotle," the

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[77] Jakob J. Petuchowski, Ever Since Sinai, Revised Third Edition (Milwaukee, 1971), no page number.

"God of Israel," who is revealed in history and the immanent divine presence of the Shekhinah.

> Inasmuch as the Jew today describes himself as 'believing in God,' he would own up to some philosophical God concept or other,--a concept which will be used to make sense of, or to account for, the universe. . . . But it is nothing that will inspire man with reverence, or wring from man's lips words of adoration. The 'God concept' we invoke by way of making sense, or trying to make sense, of the universe, is not identical with the biblical 'God Who harkens to prayer.' It is also not the God with Whom one can associate the 'revelation' of Torah.[78]

Petuchowski concentrates his theology largely on the God of Israel, whose existence and nature were made manifest to Israel in certain historical situations like the liberation from Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea and the revelation at Mt. Sinai. Like Doppelt and Polish, Petuchowski contends, "legendary or not--it still remains a fact that the people, as a whole, in view of certain experiences they had undergone, accepted certain obligations as part of their covenant commitment."[79] At certain moments in the course of history God lifted happenings and events from the level of the routine and ordinary and raised them to the level of revelation. It is clear that Petuchowski's conception of the God of Israel is linked directly to his understanding of revelation.

Revelation

The conception of the God of Israel is that of a God who is the sovereign creator and ruler of the universe, and who is very much involved in the moral government of the world. Such a relationship between God and humankind requires some form of communication from God revealing the divine will. "The concept of the 'Sovereign of the Universe' in Judaism, therefore, inevitably leads to the concept of Torah, to the revelation of God's will to man."[80] Torah and commandments are the contents of God's revelation. In Judaism, the obligations are spelled out. This, according to Petuchowski,

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[78]Ibid., 39.
[79]Ibid., 40.
[80]Ibid., 47.

is halachah. And this belief in divine revelation is not jeoparidized by the findings of biblical scholarship. In Petuchowski's estimation, even if the premises of higher criticism are accepted,

> we can draw from them the logical conclusion that the Jew in the past was mistaken in his view about the authorship of the Pentateuch. What does not follow logically from the findings of the Higher Criticism is the widespread notion that, because Moses did not write the Torah it can no longer be the authoritative rule of Jewish life.[81]

Petuchowski fundamentally disagrees with Kaufmann Kohler's notions about the origin of ceremonies and rituals. He says, ". . . what makes an observance part of the Torah is not at all the meaning and significance which this observance may originally have had in a pagan environment, but the meaning given to it within the framework of the Torah."[82] This meaning is found in the hallowing of the ordinary. Petuchowski is also able to integrate scientific findings into his theology:

> if . . I am convinced that God can, and does, reveal Himself to man, then it makes very little difference whether the documents purporting to contain this revelation are a few hundred years more or less recent than was believed to be the case in my grandfather's time[83]

Petuchowski was not satisfied with previous formulations of the Reform movement like the Pittsburgh and Columbus Platforms because they did not portray God as the metzaveh, the source of the commandments. His program, therefore, does make this connection, which is, he believes, the only way that halachah may be taken seriously:

> Thus, with all the 'change of heart' that Reform Judaism has undergone in preparation for, and as a consequence of, the Columbus Platform, it is no nearer now than it was 80 years ago to link up with the halachic tradition of Judaism. An upsurge of interest in 'ritual' and 'ceremonies' there has undoubtedly been, and attempts have not been lacking to standardize Reform Jewish practice to conform to what superficially may appear as a Reform halacha. . . . A little

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[81] Ibid., 108-109.

[82] Ibid., 76.

[83] Jakob J. Petuchowski, "The Problem of Reform Halacha," Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought, Bernard Martin, ed., (Chicago, 1968), 110.

> reflection will, however, show the unsuitablility of this particular method to get anywhere near a concept of halacha.[84]

In this way Petuchowski's system may be distinguished from any which takes as its authority what the people are actually doing, which he finds absurd in that one set of statistics indicated that there were more Reform Jews who had Christmas trees in their homes than observed kashrut. He also disapproves of any program which advocates ceremonialism to create "warmth," or to answer human psychological needs. These latter reasons Petuchowski calls "religious pageantry," rather than halachah.[85] Halachah is impossible unless it is grounded in God, the source of revelation. Likewise, Torah is meaningless if divorced from the belief in God.

Rituals and ceremonies fit neatly into the picture of revelation. Using the detailed Passover laws as an example, Petuchowski explains: The Israelite's liberation from Egypt was understood by them as an expression of God's will that people should be free. The best way to transmit this value to future generations is to follow the prescribed Passover traditions. Hence Petuchowski concludes, "all the laws and regulations pertaining to our observance of Passover can be said to be 'divine laws.'"[86]

Jakob Petuchowski published the original version of Ever Since Sinai in 1961. He expanded the last chapter, "To Study and to Do," in 1979 when the third edition was published. That it was this chapter that was expanded, the practical application of the theory, is instructive. Petuchowski felt that readers desired a way of transforming "a mere theory of Torah to the deeds and to the way of life in which Torah finds concrete expression."[87] The author's main message in this chapter is to study the rich Jewish tradition, and then to open oneself to its possibilities: "The accumulated heritage of the Jewish past is ours to select from, ours to experiment with, in our endeavor to find out

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[84]Ibid., 113.
[85] Ibid., 114-115.
[86]Petuchowski, Sinai, 74-75.
[87]Ibid., no page number.

what God wants us to do." [88] While traditional, this is not an Orthodox conception, for Petuchowski encourages experimentation and an openness to tradition, not strict adherence to legal prescriptions.

Summary

Jakob J. Petuchowski, member of the 1952 ordination class of the Hebrew Union College, wrote a beautiful and passionate polemic most sympathetic to tradition. His theology included concepts of halachah, mitzvah, covenant, and divine revelation. He never pushed for Reform acceptance of traditional halachah, but felt there is, and should be, a Reform halachah. The ultimate authority for this halachah is God, but individuals must determine for themselves exactly how it is that God speaks to them and how they will respond. Petuchowski did see it as a Jewish obligation to observe the mitzvot that are personally fulfilling. Throughout our discussion we have compared Petuchowski to his predecessors, so we will not repeat those observations here. Rather, we will briefly turn our attention to Alvin Reines, also a member of the 1952 ordination class of the Hebrew Union College. His theological ideas are strikingly different from those of classmate Jakob J. Petuchowski.

Alvin J Reines

Alvin Reines put forth his theory of Reform Judaism as a polydoxy in "God and Jewish Theology" included in Bernard Martin's collection of essays entitled Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought. We will briefly examine Reines's discussion of God and revelation, for it is connected to his view of authority, which is of particular interest to our study.

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[88] Ibid., 110.

God and Revelation

Reines's entire philosophy is predicated on his understanding that much of the modern world has given up its belief in theistic absolutism, "the notion that God is a transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent person who is directly concerned with the individual and collective welfare of man."[89] Reines confidently states, "The rejection of theistic absolutism is prevalent among clergy and laity alike."[90] Reines's desire is to describe a religion which is not automatically rejected when theistic absolutism is rejected. Reines believes that his system of Reform Judaism, polydoxy, follows directly from this large-scale rejection of theistic absolutism. Two major principles derive from the denial of a theistic absolute God and form the backbone of Reines's argument.

First, "the community of Reform Jews denies the existence of an authoritative body of knowledge or beliefs whose affirmation is obligatory upon the members of the community."[91] This is so because Reform Jews have, almost by definition, rejected the notion that the Bible is the literal word of God. In fact Reines argues that this denial is what distinguishes Reform Judaism from Pharisaism: "Thus this denial is the proximate cause which brings Reform Judaism into existence and the ground upon which it stands."[92] No subsequent prophecy has been accepted by Reform Jews which would make known the word of God. This means that there is no authoritative way to determine God's will. If there is no infallible knowledge, all knowledge is the product of finite, fallible (that is, human) minds and is therefore not obligatory for Reform Jews.

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[89]Alvin J. Reines, "God and Jewish Theology," in Bernard Martin, Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought, 62.
[90]Ibid.
[91]Ibid., 65.
[92]Ibid.

The second major principle of Reines's arguments is that Reform Judaism is a "polydoxy." A polydoxy is defined as "a religion that admits as equally valid all opinions on the great themes of religion. . . . The only beliefs disallowed are those inconsistent with its polydox nature, for example, belief in an authoritative revelation or an orthodox doctrine."[93] This principle flows from the first.

Authority

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, individual freedom is of paramount importance to Reines. He described the derivation of this principle in an article published in the CCAR Journal in 1960. Reines identified two aspects of a person's self with respect to decision making: "the decision-making self" and "the decision-executing self."[94] A free person's decision-making self has the authority to enforce the obedience of the decision-executing self. Authority over someone exists when someone supersedes the decision-making self of another and enforces obedience of that person's decision-executing self. Reines holds it to be a self-evident truth that every person has the right to be free, to be his/her own authority.

Reform Judaism may not demonstrate any de facto right to supersede any individual's self-authority. It has given up that right with its rejection of verbal revelation. A person may choose, however, to transfer this right to another person or to an institution:

> Should a person . . . choose voluntarily to accept his rabbi or the CCAR as authorities, then [they] become authorities for him in any situation in which he calls upon them to act as such. Given this concept of authority, it remains meaningful for Reform Judaism to have a response [sic] committee, for example, because the committee is made into an authoritative body by those persons who seek from it guidance on some problem.[95]

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[93]Ibid., 66.
[94]Alvin J. Reines, "Authority in Reform Judaism," CCAR J. 8 (April, 1960), 17.
[95]Ibid., 30.

In other words, Reform Jews who desire guidance may look to rabbis and Reform instituitions to find it.

Summary

Although his premises may be different from those of other theologians, Reines has said essentially the same thing as Reformers had been saying all along: the Reform movement has authority over individuals only when given it by those individuals themselves. In fact, other, more conservative writers might be more prudent in their understanding of authority. Solomon Freehof, author of many responsa referred to by Reines, has said that the Jewish tradition his responsa reflect rightfully constitutes "guidance not governance." It would be logical for Reines to counter that, should a person decide to allow it, the responsa committee could serve as the individual's "decision-making self."

Reines does differ radically from his colleagues in both his understanding of God and of Reform Judaism. With respect to the former, Reines allows for any God-concept which is consistent with his premise of individual freedom as established and guaranteed in polydoxy. This means, however, that Reines will not accept the traditional, theistic God-concept. His own definition of theology reflects his philosophy and makes no assumptions about belief or non-belief in God. Theology is defined as "the science or study which treats of the meaning of the word God."[96] Similarly, the type of Reform Judaism described by Reines emphasizes "Reform" over "Judaism." This distinction makes his work unique among the Reform theolgians. It is instructive to note that his views are not widely accepted, despite his many years of teaching at the Hebrew Union College and several scholarly contributions to the literature.

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[96]Reines, "God," 67.

Reines's work has spurred much criticism. A statement by Norbert Samuelson in a paper presented to the 1967 CCAR conference, is representative of the type of criticism Reines has received:

> Reform Judaism is not something private. Whatever it is it relates to people in a community, it implies rules of procedure. But, given the doctrine of radical freedom [the name given to Reines's polydoxy], there can be no rules of procedure. Anything seems to go, and if anything goes, nothing goes, that is, we have not a community, but merely a random collection of individuals.[97]

We will return to some of Reines's criticism in the third chapter of the present study. The mid-sixties were a time of vast differences within the CCAR. The issue of synod and creed which had occupied the early Reformers re-emerged in full force, with debates about guides and authority. At the same time that Alvin Reines was writing about individual autonomy and polydoxy, others in the movement were advocating Reform halachah and guides to religious practice.

W. Gunther Plaut

In 1965 W. Gunther Plaut spoke before the CCAR about the wisdom of and need for a guide to Reform Jewish practice produced by the movement. Although he is not normally considered a theologian, Plaut has been outspoken on issues concerning mitzvah and halachah. Plaut also served as president of the CCAR, and thus his influence on the nature and direction of the movement has been considerable.

Plaut's 1965 speech proposing a guide to Shabbat observance for Reform Jews led to the establishment of a Sabbath Committee in the CCAR. Plaut was named chair of that committee. It was within the debate about the publication of A Shabbat Manual that the issues of mitzvah and halachah were discussed. The arguments presented by Plaut in this speech directly refute Alvin Reines's ideas. Plaut made the following observations:

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[97]Norbert Samuelson, "A Therapy for Religious Definitions: Guides and Ignosticism in Reform Judaism," CCARJ, 14 (June 1967) : 23.

> we have failed to give direction to our people. How can they know what is expected when we steadfastly refuse to tell them? Vague pronouncements about 'observing the spirit of the Sabbath' are about as efficacious as talking about 'being good' . . . . I am of course talking about a guide for Shabbat. Say no to such a guide and you will by your negation condone our present hefkerut (chaos).[98]

In order to restore order within the Reform movement, Plaut advocated the revitalization of halachah in Reform terms. Plaut defined halachah as "a way which tells the Jew what he must do,"[99] and argued that halachah was consistent with Reform.

> To return to a concept of Reform halacha is not to falsify Reform Judaism but to return to its foundation heads. All the early Conferences and synods were concerned with halacha. It was never a question of whether to have rules, but what rules to have. . . .[100]

Plaut accepted the Doppelt and Polish definition of mitzvah as an encounter with God, and saw halachah as the way in which to observe a mitzvah. Plaut considered mitzvah to be an indigenous part of Judaism, and insisted that there could be no Judaism without mitzvah. But the author acknowledges that his "mitzvah" is not identical to the "mitzvah" of Jewish tradition. He said, " . . . the sense of mitzvah is still strongly alive, although it is not necessarily grounded in theology." In fact, Plaut admitted that the new usage of traditional terms is for emotional purposes; we are hesitant to break the thread of tradition.[101] It was Plaut's contention that most Reform Jews would agree that they must do something to remain Jews. The guides he proposed would tell Reform Jews what to do.

After the publication of A Shabbat Manual in 1972 the Sabbath Committee became the Committee on Reform Jewish Practice. This committee worked on the next guide of the proposed plan, the Gates of Mitzvah. We will examine this book in Chapter Two, but

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[98]W. Gunther Plaut, "The Sabbath in the Reform Movement," CCARYB, 75 (1965) : 189.
[99]Plaut, "The Halacha of Reform," in Bernard Martin, Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought, 93.
[100]Plaut, "Sabbath," 190.
[101]Plaut, "Halacha," 98-99.

the essays included in this guide concerning conceptions of mitzvah are of interest to us here.

Essays in Gates of Mitzvah

The Gates of Mitzvah was published in 1979 as a guide to the celebration of the Jewish life cycle. It was edited by Simeon Maslin and represented the work of a large CCAR committee. The guide used the language of the Doppelt and Polish book, "It is a mitzvah to . . ." , but based itself on a different understanding of the word "mitzvah " The book left the definition of mitzvah relatively vague, but managed to convey that it had to do with "Jewish oppurtunities" and "obligations." Four essays in the back of the volume attempt to theologically ground the use of the word. We will be examining the contents of the guide and its use of the word "mitzvah" in depth in Chapter Two. Here we will concern ourselves with the additional essays. "Mitzvah: the Larger Context, " by Arthur Lelyveld, focuses on ethical mitzvot, for, "to publish a book on the mitzvot of Judaism without some reference to its ethics would be unthinkable."[102] David Polish, Roland Gittelsohn, and Herman Schaalman all focus on the source of mitzvah That is, each identifies a metzaveh, or commander of the mitzvot.

David Polish

David Polish's contribution to Gates of Mitzvah was a re-working of the introduction to his and Frederic Doppelt's Guide to Jewish Practice originally published in 1957. He repeated his definition of mitzvah as an encounter with God, and selected those passages of the original piece that focused on mitzvah. His perspective was on history and the shared experience of the Jewish people. Polish's one addition was that today, in the "apocalyptic times" in which we live, "It would be an overstatement to say that mitzvah will guarantee our survival, but it can be said that our individual and

[102]Maslin, Gates of Mitzvah, 98.

collective decision to persist as Jews will be aided by cultivating a life of mitzvot."[103] Within a historical perspective, Polish interprets mitzvah as an important survival issue for Jews.

Herman E. Schaalman

In "The Divine Authority of the Mitzvah," Schaalman identifies God as the source of the commandments, the metzaveh. God "indisputably" made the mitzvot known first by way of Moses, and then by way of prophets and rabbis, who were the spiritual descendants of Moses.[104] His interpretation is close to that put forth by Doppelt and Polish, in that he spoke of revelation as "the mystery of encounter with God, to the unique and rare moments when a given person and the Divine Presence 'meet.'" God became the metzaveh for Moses, for example, because Moses understood, interpreted, "heard" God's presence because of his extraordinary closeness to God.[105] As Jews, this is our legacy:

> Why should we do mitzvot? Because we are the descendants of those ancestors, the children of those parents who said at Sinai: 'Na-aseh ve'nishma--We shall do and we shall hear' (Exodus 24:7). All authentic Judaism until now has so understood itself, has so acted and so handed it on to hitherto faithful generations. Thus the Divine Presence waits for us, and we for It. Thus the commandment comes to us in our time, asking to be heard, understood and done.[106]

This is a rather traditional understanding of revelation, and we will return to the author's use of the word "authentic" in Chapter Three. Schaalman tempered his traditionalism by acknowledging that all people do not respond to the presence of God in an identical fashion. He admits that there will be some mitzvot of his ancestors that will not engage him and which he will therefore not do. But, at the same time there

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[103]David Polish, "History as the Source of the Mitzvah," in Maslin, Gates of Mitzvah, 107.
[104]Herman E. Schaalman, "The Divine Authority of the Mitzvah," in Maslin, Gates of Mitzvah, 100.
[105]Ibid., 102.
[106]Ibid.

will be some mitzvot that his ancestors never heard which will call to him. The ability to "hear" commandments depends upon one's willingness to hear them:

> it all depends on whether I am ready to live my life in relationship to God, in response to Him, in my acceptance of His being Commander and of me as His covenant partner, giving life to the berit--the covenant--by my mitzvah response. And while I have and retain the freedom of choosing my specific means of response at a given moment, the essential factor of my life will be my intention to respond.[107]

Schaalman's approach mirrors that taken by Doppelt and Polish, and seems to underlie the (derivative) Gates of Mitzvah system as well. That is, certain principles are accepted as mitzvot which require a response from Jews. The nature of this response is left to the individual, who may be instructed by a "code" or a guide.

Roland Gittelsohn

"Mitzvah without Miracles," Gittelsohn's contribution to Gates of Mitzvah, presents a naturalist point of view toward mitzvot. The author defines a naturalist as "one who believes in God, but asserts that God inheres with nature and operates through natural law."[108]

Gittelsohn agreed with Polish's rationale for the binding quality of mitzvot: "because something happened between God and Israel, and the same thing continues to happen in every land and age." This something is a "historic encounter between the Jewish people and the highest Spiritual Reality human beings have ever known or felt. No other people has been so persistent as ours in seeking that Reality and its moral imperatives."[109]

The naturalistic character of Gittelsohn's essay may be seen in both his definition of mitzvah and in his understanding of the authority of mitzvah. The author defines mitzvah as "the recognition, acceptance and observance of physical law and ethics--

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[107]Ibid., 103.
[108]Roland Gittelsohn, "Mitzvah without Miracles," in Maslin, Gates of Mitzvah, 108.
[109]Ibid., 109.

which are ineluctable aspects of reality." The authority for mitzvot emerges from a human need for the pattern of ritual. Gittelsohn charges that our very basic nature, our human need for this type of structure, is "mitzvah." In this way, God, as the core spiritual essence of reality is the metzaveh for the Jew who "responds naturalistically to his own essence and to that of his universal setting."[110] The idea of a non-personal God being a metzaveh is complicated, but Gittelsohn explains that the physical and spiritual laws governing reality (God) create mitzvot that are inherent within the universe. To Gittelsohn mitzvot are a matter of survival:

> Mitzvot must be observed because only by recognizing and conforming to the nature of their environment can human beings increase the probablity of their survival in any meaningful way. . . . The universe is so constructed that, if I wish to survive, I must have adequate oxygen, nourishment, and exercise. God 'wants' me to breathe fresh air, ingest healthful foods, and regularly move my muscles. These, therefore, are mitzvot.[111]

Gittelsohn insists that both ritual and ethical mitzvot are binding. Ritual mitzvot are physical reminders of what we proclaim with our words. This notion leads us into our discussion of Arthur Lelyveld's discourse on ethical mitzvot.

Arthur Lelyveld

Probably the most significant aspect of Lelyveld's essay in Gates of Mitzvah is that its inclusion is the one real acknowledgment of ethical mitzvot in the book. The presence of a single essay, unaccompanied by any section of the book devoted to the practice of ethics as part of a Reform Jewish lifestyle, in the publication of a movement founded on its belief in the primacy of ethics, is instructive. We will return to a discussion of this phenomenon in our third chapter.

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[110] Ibid., 109-110.
[111] Ibid., 108-109.

Lelyveld defines mitzvah as an act to be performed because God requires it. With respect to how to choose which mitzvot to observe, Lelyveld's words echo those of the early Reformers:

> We liberal Jews read Scripture not as the literal word of God, but as the work of members of the people Israel seeking to understand the demand of God. Once we approach our Bible within that frame of reference, we necessarily become selective, for there are points in Scripture at which man has broken through to an understanding of the highest, while there are also points that preserve primitive practices, anachronism, or injunctions that long ago became obsolete.[112]

At this point Lelyveld distinguished between two different types of mitzvot. "Mitzvot" with a capital "m" answer the question, "When does God speak to us?" In contrast, "mitzvot" with a lower case "m" describe ritual acts with "an aesthetic and affective function. . . . large-M Mitzvah is the enduring essence to which the structure of small m testifies and pays obeisance.[113] Mitzvot are the obligation of all Jews. Of course, however, Lelyveld recognized the individual as the ultimate authority regarding mitzvah observance.

Lelyveld concluded with an eloquent reminder of our human task:

> For us, the demand of God which challenges us to compassion and to respect for the divine image in every fellowman must as Mitzvah eventuate in the Mitzvah which is perfect: action in the world in behalf of human rights, justice and peace. . . . [in this way] we demonstrate that we are kedoshim, reflections of the Divine presentness.[114]

Summary

Taken as a whole, the essays included in Gates of Mitzvah attempt to makes sense of the word "mitzvah" which is used throughout the book without definition. The inclusion of more than one ideology may be confusing to the average reader of the

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[112]Arthur Lelyveld, "Mitzvah: The Larger Context," in Maslin, Gates of Mitzvah, 111.
[113]Ibid., 112.
[114]Ibid., 114-115.

book. Yet, the book is consistent with the historical recognition that Reform Jews have divergent levels of doing and understanding. We will return to this discussion in our analysis of the book as a whole in Chapter Two.

Eugene B. Borowitz

Eugene Borowitz, professor of theology and philosophy at Hebrew Union College in New York, has made numerous contributions to the literature of the Reform movement. He was particularly influential in his capacity as primary author of the Centenary Perspective of the CCAR in 1976, the document which has served to replace the Columbus Platform of 1937 as the official statement of the Reform movement. This document will be examined in the next chapter, but to the extent that Borowitz's own theological notions are reflected in that document, some examination of his work is relevant here.

God and Covenant

Borowitz believes that Jews possess a covenantal relationship with God which obligates them to the observance of mitzvot. In Liberal Judaism, Borowitz declared, ". . . a good Jew has a living relationship with God as part of the people of Israel and therefore[is] living a life of Torah."[115] For Borowitz, acknowledgment of God's oneness and uniqueness led directly to the primacy of religion as the basic framework of one's life: ". . . one must be a Jew in everything one does." Belief requires commitment. And commitment means action more importantly than words, feelings or mental states. He said, "A religion which makes no serious claims upon its adherents should not itself be taken seriously."[116] Borowitz listed three areas of Jewish responsibility demanded by the covenant:

1. Ethical behavior toward all people;

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[115]Eugene B. Borowitz, Liberal Judaism (New York, 1984), 134.
[116]Ibid., 127-128.

2. Daily prayer, study and religious observance;
3. Commitment to the survival of all Jews everywhere.[117]

In Borowitz's theology God is the metzaveh: ". . . our belief in God and the covenant ought to have power over our lives."[118] Borowitz suggested that liberal Jews fear accepting God because they are afraid this will lead them to observance of all the commandments. He countered this fear by stating that although both the Oral and Written Law have much to teach, they are not binding. Liberal Jews insist upon the freedom to choose which aspects of the Jewish tradition they will observe and which require new forms to make them relevant and/or acceptable. Borowitz stressed awareness of God as the metzaveh, however, and when approaching tradition, Reform Jews should do so "in terms of our deepest 'commitment,' for, when we ask about religious duties, we are speaking of the service of God. Then whatever we choose from the past or create for the present should rest upon us with the full force of commandment."[119] Borowitz called upon Reform Jews to allow ritual to direct them to God, and to provide them with contact with the holy. For these very theological reasons Borowitz strongly advocated a Jewish way of life consisting of the observance of ritual mitzvot. He, like many others, believed the mitzvot mandatory, their manner of observance, flexible. Here again, the element of autonomy emerges as essential. Reform Jews must confront the tradition, their responses will be as individual as they are.

General Summary

The present discussion has sought to highlight trends and stages in theological thinking from the beginnings of the Reform movement in America until recent times. It has singled out the most influential thinkers and teachers of the movement for examination.

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[117] Ibid., 134.
[118] Ibid., 319.
[119] Ibid., 331.

There have been some consistent threads which have run through the theology of the Reform movement throughout its entire history. For our purposes, the most important of these commonalities is the rejection of belief in a literal Sinaitic revelation as described in Exodus. Yet revelation was not abandoned; each thinker had his own conception of revelation. These ranged from Wise's limitation of revelation to the Ten Commandments and Kohler's belief that only the ethical laws were eternal and binding, to more traditional concepts like that of Petuchowski, Plaut and Borowitz. The latter theologians teach that revelation is a matter of human openness to it; if one seeks, one is likely to find.

The idea of an interactive nature of revelation prevalent in modern Reform is connected to other theological notions. The early Reformers seemed to conceive of a transcendent God, one who rules from above. This God revealed principles to Reform Jews which they were obligated to spread to accomplish the mission of Israel. Later God-concepts stress God's immanence. Borowitz's Covenant is a good example of a theology in which human beings and God work together. Petuchowski, too, stressed that human beings must strive to understand what it is that God wants from them.

Conceptions of mitzvot and halachot are related to various beliefs about the human role with respect to God. Early Reformers spoke far less about the human struggle to come to terms with what was appropriate religious practice. They saw the most important criteria as relevance to modern life and appropriateness for the cause of the mission. In the more modern formulations, human beings must "confront" all of Judaism to determine the mitzvot they themselves must observe.

The theoretical body of literature examined here has been the foundation for the development of the major platforms of the movement, the rabbi's manuals which dictate the form and content of life cycle ceremonies, and the guides to religious observance. In the next chapter we will examine these official documents and

publications in order to assess the impact of the theological trends noted in this chapter.

Chapter Two

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Our first chapter described the theologies of important Reform thinkers with an emphasis on their theoretical conceptions of authority and mitzvot. In this chapter we move from the theoretical to the practical. We focus here on the application of theory to documents produced by the CCAR or, in some cases, by some of its individual members. We will first outline some of the general historical perspectives on the authority-freedom dialectic, taken largely from CCAR Conference discussions and journal articles. Then our study will examine documents of the movement: the platforms of 1885, 1937 and 1976, the several guides to religious observance, the rabbi's manuals, and the responsa literature.

Historical Background on the Issue of Authority

From very early a feeling of dissatisfaction was felt by both the rabbinate and some sectors of the laity. Rabbis expressed deep discontent with the religious picture of American Reform. For example, in 1898, Adolph Guttmacher spoke of spiritual malaise:

> Since we have abandoned some of the old landmarks, reverential awe has given place to a spirit of criticism that is cold and calculating and [has] not imbued, those who look to us for light and guidance, with that self-same spirit and attitude toward our faith.[1]

Rabbi I. L. Leucht also noted the problem, remarking in 1902 that the perception of Reform Judaism had "gone down in this country beyond resurrection."[2]

These comments suggest that the feeling existed that somehow the Reform movement had not succeeded, or that perhaps it had strayed from its original path.

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[1]Guttmacher, Adolph. "Modern Thought--Tendencies in Judaism," CCARYB, 8 (1898) : 151.

[2]I. L. Leucht, "Discussion of the Jewish Religious School," CCARYB, 12 (1902) : 196-197.

An "identity crisis" challenged the movement. Reform felt a need to defend its basis for validity. It needed more definition: What exactly did Reform stand for? The problem at this stage was framed largely within the context of the universalism-particularism polarity. The universalist position was blamed, at least partially, for the difficulty the movement experienced trying to maintain and develop its various positions. Rabbis more favorably inclined to particularism suggested that Reform re-direct itself by a return to a more specifically Jewish grounding.

While the universalism-particularism question was the primary focus of attention in the early years of the Conference, our concentration is on the authority question which was budding at the same time. The root of the controversy has always been the Reform understanding of divine revelation. In contrast to traditional Jewish thinking which asserts that authority and power are rooted in the tradition as a manifestation of divine will, Reform thinkers have historically stressed the freedom of the individual. But freedom, except in one or two isolated examples, has never been the sole principle revered by Reformers. Rather, a tension between authority and freedom has persisted throughout the history of the movement. The nature of the deliberations changed over time, as did the vocabulary, but the fundamental philosophical principles have remained constant. At the root of the issue are questions about the source of authority (the metzaveh), and its boundaries.

In 1949 Bernard J. Bamberger expressed the essence of the great debate surrounding authority which had existed within the American Reform movement since its inception. He said:

> Just as Reform Judaism challenged the old concept of "Torah from heaven," so it rebelled against the absolute authority of Jewish law. . . Is the Reform Jew, as Jew, subject to any authority save his own conscience, taste, or whim? . . . But who shall decide what are the ethical and ritual duties of the Reform Jew? What standards shall govern the procedures of the Reform synagogue? Can there be any communal or national controls within our movement?. . . Our

> most difficult task. . . [is] to establish the source of authority in liberal Jewish life. . . .[3]

The problem which Bamberger described was as true before he uttered these words as after. It has been, and continues to be, a problem of central importance for the Reform movement.

An early conception was that Reform should seek to gain control over the theological and ritual anarchy which had grown out of the rationalistic personality of the movement. Two paths to this objective were proposed: synod and creed. These became key issues in the Conference throughout the first decade of the new century. Synod and creed were seen as two sides of the same coin. A synod would invest the movement with a religious legislative authority; a creed would give it a doctrinal basis. We noted in the first chapter that Isaac M. Wise was in favor of a creed for the Reform movement. In 1898 he suggested the idea to the CCAR:

> Permit me to reiterate my old problem, to lay before the world a clear and comprehensive statement of the principles of Judaism--call them principles, dogmas, doctrines, precepts, or by any other name--but let the world know clearly and distinctly what is the substance of Judaism.[4]

The sentiment expressed by Solomon Sonneschein sums up the attitude of those favoring some type of formal guidance from the CCAR: "Liberty is not license and independence is not indifference."[5] That is, there are limits to freedom. Here limits were described in terms of prevention of anarchy; later arguments would call for limits in terms of responsibility. A CCAR committee was established to construct a creed.

This committee was frustrated in its attempts to complete its task and so declared the formulation of a creed an impossibility. At first the committee tried to revise its

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[3]Bernard J. Bamberger, "Introduction," in Reform Judaism: Essays by Hebrew Union College Alumni (Cincinnati, 1949), 23-36.

[4]Isaac M. Wise, "President's Annual Address," CCARYB, 8 (1898): 16.

[5]Solomon Sonneschein, "Judaism and its Religious Developments in the Nineteenth Century," CCARYB, 11 (1901): 115.

assignment. Forsaking a creed, it set out instead to prepare a work on the fundamental

principles of Jewish theology. It proposed a collection of essays by different scholars, all experts in the field. Three years later only a small number of the essays had been written, and the committee finally substituted Kaufmann Kohler's book Jewish Theology, Systematically and Historically Considered in lieu of a committee-prepared creed.[6]

The sentiment of the Conference during these early years was generally against a synod and/or creed. Many arguments were presented. As there was no consensus on the matter, it was feared that a creed might fragment the Conference. There was the feeling that a creed would arbitrarily elevate some aspects of Reform's development to an undeserved status while neglecting others. That could lead to the erroneous conclusion that unmentioned subjects were of no importance. Another factor was the Conference's commitment to the rights of the individual. At this relatively early stage in the dissassociation of Reform from Orthodoxy and the Shulchan Aruch, the rabbis were presumably fiercely dedicated to preserving this value. There was no desire to find a substitute for rabbinic legislation. Reform understood itself as a process, not as a static entity. A creed would jeopardize this characteristic of the movement. In fact, the notion of process remained primary throughout the history of the movement and would influence every document it produced.

A little later, from about 1911 until 1918, the Conference sidestepped the issue of creed and located authority in the process of history.[7] Religious validity was thought to be found in the historical experience, so that the past could serve as the

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[6]See Reports of the Committee on the Elaboration of a Systematic Theology. CCARYB 18 (1908) : 111-112; 21 (1911) : 75-76; and 28 (1918) : 111-113.
[7]Milton Matz, "American Reform Judaism 1890-1937" (Rabbinic thesis, HUC-JIR, 1952), 71.

basis of orientation toward the future. This conception, too, has remained an integral part of Reform thinking.

The synod was conceived as a body of rabbis and lay people convoked to fix definitely the principle and practice for modern Judaism. As mentioned in our first chapter, Isaac M. Wise strongly advocated the establishment of a synod. He encouraged a body vested with coercive power that would arrive at unanimous decisions which could then become law.[8] The results of a synod would be increased uniformity and decreased anarchy in belief and ritual:

> Reforms, if they should exercise a salutary influence, must come from the people and must satisfy the demands of the people, they must be legally Jewish, and must not have the tendency of exciting suspicion or disunion among ourselves; they must tend toward elevating Judaism. . . .[9]

The CCAR heard two pleas in favor of a synod in 1903. Jacob Voorsanger proposed a synod to consider both religious and political matters.[10] His argument focused on disagreements concerning Shabbat observance, which had become deadlocked in the union, but was supported by the Kishinev massacres of that year which threatened the lives of European Jews and consequently called for unity among American Jewry. The other conception, that of Rabbi Silverman, was that a synod was desirable to decide theological issues. He put forth a list of suggested topics for consideration by a synod, including the determination of definite articles of Jewish theology, how to further Shabbat observance, the best methods of electing rabbis, the best methods of gaining the unaffiliated, intermarriage, proselytism, and cremation.[11]

A vote taken on the synod issue at the 1904 CCAR convention, was, in the words of Solomon B. Freehof, "so inconclusive that the Conference did not take final action

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[8]Heller, Wise, 574.
[9]Ibid., 573.
[10]"Report of Sabbath Commission," CCARYB, 13 (1903) : 153-155.
[11]"Message of President Joseph Silverman," CCARYB, 13 (1903) : 26-28.

and the subject never came up again."[12] The essential implications of a synod have remained problematic throughout the history of the Reform movement, as rabbis and lay people alike have consistently balked at the idea of any type of Reform legislation. No synod was ever established, but the issue did re-emerge in the sixties (Freehof's remark, made in 1941, was premature). The publication of the several manuals to Reform practice have consistently portrayed their role as strictly advisory, never compulsory.

Discontent remained within the movement and even increased in the 1930's. The discord became focused on ceremony and ritual, as the Reform movement's ranks swelled with Eastern European immigrants. These Jews brought their love of ceremonialism and symbolism into the movement when they became more active in it. Both laity and rabbis began to feel that Reform Judaism lacked something both in ritual and in the general attitude of Reform toward Jewish life. This "lack of something" was a direct reflection of the Pittsburgh Platform which downplayed the importance of ritual. Much symbolism and ceremonialism had been rejected by Reform Jews. In the 1930's, however, the wisdom of this attitude was questioned. Some felt that perhaps the lack of ceremony contributed to the disinterest in Judaism among Reform congregations. One rabbi, Jacob D. Schwartz, observed:

> In a word, indifference led to neglect, neglect led to disuse, disuse was followed by ignorance, and as a result, the beauty, sanctity and influence of the Jewish home have become grievously impaired.[13]

In 1931 Samuel Gup spoke at length before the CCAR. He urged the "practice of relevant ceremonials and the forging of new ceremonials so as to enrich the emotional content of Reform Judaism." He sensed that CCAR advocacy of religious practice would

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[12]Solomon B. Freehof, "A Code of Ceremonial and Ritual Practice," CCARYB, 51 (1941): 290.

[13]Matz, "American Reform Judaism," 25.

> bring Reform Jewry closer to the heart of the people of Israel. It would weave ceremonial ties with the life of the whole people. Some of the estrangement now existing. . . is due to the needless casting aside of much that was beautiful and accepted in Jewish ceremonial. As a step toward Jewish unity, a renaissance of ceremonialism is indispensable.[14]

Of particular interest in Gup's remark is his mention of Jewish unity. While Gup himself did not ascribe any authority to the ideal of Jewish unity, it would eventually become a critical factor in the authority debate. Then the question would be: Does the attainment of Jewish unity depend on or require certain standards of behavior for all Reform Jews?

In general, the Reform movement was very much influenced by those who wanted more ceremony. This resolution was passed in 1937 by the UAHC:

> Whereas, Reform Jewish worship has allowed many symbols, customs, etc., of traditional worship to fall into disuse; and Whereas, It is the sense of this Convention that many of these forms should be re-introduced:
>
> Now, therefore, Be It Resolved, That this Convention recommend to its constituent congregations, and to all Reform Jewish Congregations, that into its Sabbath Services be put, and made a part thereof, traditional symbols, ceremonies and customs. . . .[15]

This resolution points to the new tendency in Reform to recognize Jewish tradition as a guide and source from which to select practice. Yet, the language used is instructive. The Union felt it necessary to pass a resolution, but merely "recommended" the inclusion of "traditional symbols, ceremonies and customs." It is interesting to note that, despite the many pleas for codes and guides, the rabbis have always been, and continue to be, in total agreement about the authority of any such document. Throughout history, some have believed Reform Jews to be in need of guidance, but few ever suggested, nor would have tolerated, anything even resembling compulsion. Therefore the fundamental question, eternally

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[14]Samuel M. Gup, "Currents in Jewish Relgious Thought and Life in America in the Twentieth Century," CCARYB, 41 (1931) : 312.

[15]Scott, "Classical Reform to Neo-Reform," 26.

unanswered, has been, "By what right does any group of Reform Jews tell any other group of Reform Jews that they must do something and what they ought to do?" Two examples of typical arguments follow, both taken from discussions held in the 1960's, but ahistorical in that they have remained essentially unchanged since the dawn of Reform Judaism. As an example of the "majority opinion" in this matter, we note a particularly creative Conference sermon by Rabbi Morris Lieberman in 1964 which pointed to two areas deserving the attention of the Reform rabbinate. He felt that the times called for rabbinical direction regarding Jewish living as a correction for "anarchy," yet he stressed, "there would be no sanctions or penalties. Those who would reject the rabbinic recommendations would not be considered sinners. . . ."[16]

The "minority opinion" in this debate was in favor of a strict, enforced code. One example of this type of thinking is found in an article by Rabbi Joseph E. Klein that mentions the revised CCAR Rabbi's Manual of 1961. The new version of the manual included a "Notes" section very much in line with mainstream Reform philosophy regarding authority. The introduction to the "Notes" stated, "Reform Judaism rejects the concept of a fixed authority derived from supernatural revelation," thus it makes "no claim either to completeness or to absolute authority."[17] Klein disagreed with the position presented in the manual. Instead, he favored authoritarianism:

> There is not even a code of conduct for rabbis. Rabbis may violate without impunity any tradition of Judaism that is not prohibited by civil law. . . . the only law Reform Judaism knows today is. . . "Every man does what is right in his own eyes." . . . It is an astonishing thing that a movement which arrogated to itself the wisdom and authority to unmake and abrogate the laws of both the Bible and the Talmud should consider itself unable to lay down rules and regulations for disciplining the followers of the movement in their religious life. What the introduction to the "Notes" says in effect is that Reform Judaism offers nothing that may be called law or commandment. . . . Everyone may do whatever he pleases. . . . This certainly is not Judaism. It is not even Reform Judaism! This kind

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[16]Morris Lieberman, "Learning from Moshe Rabbenu," CCARYB, 74 (1964) : 44.
[17]CCAR, Rabbi's Manual (New York, 1961), 109.

> of so-called Judaism is a soulless misrepresentation of a great tradition and faith. . . .[18]

Klein urged a return to the principle of law and to the development of a code and liturgy based on it.

Samuel Cohon, the most influential Reform thinker of the 1930's and 40's, was in favor of some sort of code. He believed that if Reform were to follow the earlier phases of the evolution of Judaism, its beliefs, ideals and standards needed to be translated into definite forms and embodied into a code. He noted, "Reform no less than Orthodoxy must make demands upon us if it is to evoke the best within us."[19]

The Columbus Platform, put forth in 1937, and authored mainly by Cohon, is read by many to be more sympathetic to ritual than the Pittsburgh Platform. The language of the Columbus platform is altogether more direct than that of Pittsburgh. Words and phrases implying obligation for religious practice are used. An entitity called "Jewish life" received a new sense of authority; the platform states that Jewish life calls for the performance of certain practices. Ritual practice was explicitly encouraged by the movement, and this endorsement was treated very seriously. The Platform did, in fact, usher in a new era of ceremonialism, and a new age for Reform: Classical Reform blossomed into Neo-Reform. In time this favorable attitude toward ritual, joined with the relatively weak stand on authority, would become characteristic for the Reform movement. But there is no question that the stage was set for these developments by the Columbus Platform.

The Committee on Ceremonies worked diligently in the 1930's and 40's to provide ritual objects and services for use by congregations and/or individuals. The stated purpose of that committee was to "encourage and stimulate experimentation in our congregations for the revival of old and the introduction of new ceremonies in the synagog and to make concrete suggestions to the congregations for the introduction

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[18]Joseph E. Klein, "The Covenant and Confirmation," CCARJ, 13 (June 1966) : 28-30.
[19]Samuel S. Cohon, "Authority in Judaism," HUCA, 11 (1936) : 593.

of such ceremonies." By way of example, they prepared enhanced Torah services and devised a trumpet mouthpiece for the shofar which encouraged the sounding of a real shofar (as opposed to a horn) on Rosh Hashanah. The committee prepared a Purim service and an abridged and illuminated version of the Megillah. Five congregations used the material to hold synagogue services on Purim in 1939. In comparison, 85 congregations did so in 1940.[20] A 1945 report of the Joint Statement on Ceremonies in the Reform Synagogue was issued over the signatures of the CCAR and UAHC. The statement listed nineteen ceremonies and ceremonial objects which had been produced by the Committee and which had begun to be implemented in UAHC congregations.[21]

It is clear that there was considerable interest within the movement in increased ritual observance in the 1940's and 50's. But just how far did this interest go? Members of the CCAR asked themselves if increased ritual should become normative for Reform practice? Thus, the increase in ritual observance was accompanied by renewed discussions of the code issue. In the 1940 Presidential Message, Rabbi Emil W. Leipziger recommended that a paper be placed on the program "as soon as possible" devoted to the feasibility and advisability of drawing up a Code of Practice. Leipziger's urgency was presumably due to his perception that the issue was "agitating the minds" of many of the younger rabbis. Leipziger's intention, however, was to quell discussion of the issue. He himself resisted any authoritarian trends.[22]

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[20]Report of Committee on Ceremonies," CCARYB, 50 (1940) : 22.

[21]Scott, "Classical Reform to Neo-Reform," 35-42. See also CCARYB reports of Committee on Ceremonies for the 1940's and 1950's.

[22]Emil W. Leipziger, "Report of the President," CCARYB, 50 (1940) : 22. Leipziger's recommendation followed the one by the Executive Board regarding the immediate drawing up of a Code of Practice by the Synagog and Community committee. See Ibid., 30-31.

The lengthy and detailed report of the Committee on the Synagog and the Community for 1941 made no mention of a code of practice,[23] despite the paper delivered by Solomon Freehof on that topic at the convention. Freehof was opposed to the creation of an authoritative code, referring to earlier Conference rejections of a synod. He was reluctant to consider Reform practice as law. Rather, ceremonial and ritual matters were viewed as custom; custom which was continually in the process of evolution. He took up the issue of Jewish observance "step by step," making "definite suggestions" about which Jewish observances should reject and which should receive "more positive action."[24] For example, he advocated doing nothing about the dietary laws, not gathering ritual ceremonies into any one book, leaving synagogue observances to the prayerbook, and publishing all responsa every ten years. He was in favor of drawing up a clear-cut code regarding marriage, divorce, and conversion.

As mentioned above, there is a difference between authoritarianism and guidance. By this time many believed that Jews could and should be guided by knowledgeable and concerned rabbis. And most agreed that no one could or should insist this guidance be carried out. In 1950, CCAR president Jacob Rader Marcus favored a guide to religious practice. He said, "It is time to set down [Reform's own Torah sheb'al peh] in black and white. We do stand for something. The rabbis need this guidance. God knows the laymen need it. . . . It is imperative, in my opinion, that we proceed to the formulation and publication of the practices of our Liberal faith." Marcus recommended that the Conference appoint a committee to draft an "extensive and detailed blueprint of Liberal Jewish practice, in all its aspects."[25] Marcus requested that the work of the committee be sent to the members of the

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[23]"Report of Committee on the Synagog and the Community," CCARYB, 51 (41) : 78-84.
[24]Freehof, "A Code of Ceremonial and Ritual Practice," 293-294.
[25]Jacob R. Marcus, "President's Message," CCARYB, 60 (1950) : 239-240.

CCAR, and that it be discussed at the next convention. The report of the administrative secretary, which chronicled action sanctioned by the Conference, did not include a recommendation that a committee be appointed to carry out Marcus's wishes.[26]

The openness of the movement to ritual, and to the work of the committee on ceremonies, is indicative of the positive attitude of both the Reform rabbinate and the laity toward ritual, regardless of the terminology used. The arguments in favor of codes and/or guides cited thus far have not used the language of law or "mitzvah." Freehof, in 1946, appears to be one of the first to do so:

> Judaism was formed by law and has lived by law . . . Reform must come to an understanding with the law or at least must define clearly its own relation to it . . . There is a growing interest amongst us for greater uniformity in practice and observance in our Reform movement . . . Must we not review the concept of mitzva, of Torah, and thus attain orderliness and consistency and authority in our Reform Jewish life?[27]

This recommendation for orderliness, consistency and authority--mitzvah--was not intended to discourage or petrify creativity, what Freehof called "the precious inheritance" of Reform.[28]

Another early reference to "mitzvah" was made by Morton Berman, moderator of a 1954 workshop held by the CCAR on changes in Reform Jewish practice. He refered here to contemporary studies conducted by the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods on ritual practice among the members of the movement:

> The day has passed when we need any longer speak of 'trends' in Reform practice. The surveys . . . provide ample proof that nearly all of the Reform congregations have accepted practices, whether we call them mitzvoth, obvservances, customs, or ceremonies, as an integral, indispensable part of Reform Jewish life. . . .[29]

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[26]"Report of the Administrative Secretary," Ibid., 28-37.
[27]Solomon B. Freehof, "Reform Judaism and the Halacha," CCARYB, 56 (1946) : 278.
[28]Ibid., 282-292.
[29]"Report on Workshop on Changes in Reform Jewish Practice," CCARYB, 64 (1954) : 125.

Abba Hillel Silver and Solomon B. Freehof, "elders" of the 1963 CCAR convention, reminisced about the state of the movement. Freehof offered sociological explanations for the reappearance of ritual, an issue he and Silver had considered already settled. He felt that, with the growth of the movement since World War Two, "almost every congregation has three quarters of its members related to Orthodox grandfathers. . . . We have become, in our family lines, reintegrated in Orthodox lives, and that, of course, has affected the type of observances in our congregations." Freehof did not call these observances "mitzvot." "That means," he said, "if the time comes when we consider any one of these changes as harmful to us, we will not hesitate to drop what we have picked up. . . .[30]

In 1960 the CCAR Journal held a special symposium entitled "In Quest of a Reform Jewish Theology" which raised issues which have proven central in the authority-freedom debate within Reform. One of the participants, Leonard S. Kravitz, addressed the problem of revelation. He wrote:

> Attempts were made in the past to retain the term while emptying it of its traditional content. . . . However, if I determine by means of my present value system that which I think God said in the past, what need is there for the past word of God? . . .[31]

Kravitz's most critical contention was that religious practice should be understood as a theological issue. He asked a question of profound importance: Were there commandments or not?

God, too, was a primary consideration in this ongoing discussion. What, if anything, had God commanded? If God commanded, were Reform Jews (or all human beings?) obligated to obey? Emil Fackenheim, a philosopher whose thinking has influenced many Reform Jews, believed God to be at the root of the question of

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[30]Solomon B. Freehof and Abba Hillel Silver, "Symposium: The American Rabbinate in our Lifetime," CCARYB, 73 (1963) : 177.

[31]Leonard S. Kravitz, "Some Probems of a 'Liberal' Jewish Theology," CCARJ, 8 (April 1960) : 14.

authority. In fact, he declared that a choice must be made between autonomy and Judaism. The two, in his mind, cannot co-exist:

> If the Jewish past is to have authority for the liberal Jew, then this past cannot be a merely human past, however great. . . . it is after all a covenant between Jew and God. Hence he stands under. . . the authority of God . . . .[32]

Other thinkers, notably Eugene B. Borowitz, spoke of a covenant between Jews and God which was to play a primary role in human decisions regarding religious practice. Borowitz also believed in the primacy and authority of tradition. He, however, placed ultimate authority with the liberal Jew, provided that s/he dissented only after "encountering" Jewish tradition in a direct and unprejudiced manner.[33]

Rabbi Sylvin Wolf made an important observation when he noted that between 1960 and 1975 the CCAR discussed authority primarily within the contexts of halachah and religious observance.[34] The word "mitzvah" eventually met with acceptance by both rabbis and lay people. In contrast, the term "halachah" has met with considerable ambivalence, and even resistance by many Reform rabbis, including the most traditional among them. Several explanations may be offered for this phenomenon. The legal connotation of "halachah" seems to be at the crux of the matter. Reform Jews, even those advocating a "Reform Halachah," are aware that their understanding of the term is not consonant with the traditional meaning. Thus, the "authenticity" issue re-emerges: Can a Reform Jew really use "halachah" in a "meaningful" (legitimate, valid) way? And, too, there is the recurrent problem of whether or not any authority is appropriate for Reform. The legal nature of the word makes this question even more difficult to answer within a Reform context.

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[32]Emil Fackenheim, "The Dilemma of Liberal Judasim: The Problem of Authority," in Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology (Bloomington, 1969), 131.
[33]Borowitz puts forth this position in several places. See, for example, the CCAR's 1963 symposium on theology, in which Borowitz spoke on "Faith and Method in Modern Jewish Theology," CCARYB, 73 (1963), 215-228.
[34]Sylvin L. Wolf, "Reform Judasim as Process: A Study of the CCAR, 1960-1975" (Master's thesis, St. Louis University, 1978), 95.

The increased use of the term suggests, to some extent, a corresponding increase in the acceptance of the concept of legalism. We will explore this major attitudinal change in our final chapter.

In light of the tension surrounding the concept of halachah, it is interesting to note the resolution adopted by the Executive Board of the CCAR in 1972, calling for "men with knowledge of Halachah and of traditional sources to sit on committees" of the CCAR.[35] The Conference also held a "Chug on Halacha" during its 1983 convention. One participant, Martin Rozenberg, claimed that Reform had an "organic relationship" with halachah. He felt that if Reform Jews did not recognize this, they would sever themselves from Jewish history. "To be a Jew," for Rozenberg, means to be "Mitzvah-observing and doing."[36]

In 1975 a "showdown" on "Religious Discipline and Liberal Judaism" featuring Rabbis Eugene Mihaly and Gunther Plaut was held at the CCAR convention. Plaut was convinced that the permissiveness of the Reform rabbinate had been a mistake. He felt that people wanted guidance and that the rabbis should provide it. He saw little evidence of a conscious, observable, Jewish lifestyle among Reform Jews. There was no sense of obligation or responsibility. Plaut suggested guidance was in order:

> Guidance we must give; this is what our people seek and need. I do not know what terminology will ultimately arise from our efforts. Some will prefer to use the term mitzvah, which transmits to Jews the traditional sense that something is demanded of them, or we might invest hovah, duty, with a sense of urgency. But whether it be mitzvah or hovah, both convey to Jews that being Jewish they are commanded, that their freedom is limited and not total. . . .
>
> None of us Rabbis who has attempted to speak of this to his members has ever dreamt of forcing anyone to do anything. But people are hungry, they want opportunities, and we in turn must say to them, "Here are your opportunites of mitzvah." . . . We must

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[35]"Minutes of the Executive Board Meeting of the CCAR," June 15, 1972 in Wolf, "Reform Judaism as Process," 183-184.

[36]Martin Rozenberg, "Chug on Halacha," CCARYB, 83 (1973) : 150-151.

> give our people choices and opportunities and above all Jewish information, so that they can make these choices intelligently and in the freedom which is theirs. . . .
>
> In whose name will such guidance be issued? In the name of Rabbis who pray that their guidance may lead Jews to meet their God. When we speak of mitzvah or hovah may we not hope that in the doing a Jew will meet the God of the Covenant? . . . We can say. . . "being a Jew I live in the context of some obligation". . . we cannot accept the Halacha of tradition, but we must relate to it. We can veto it, but we cannot overlook it as if it did not exist. Reform is Jewish continuity, not discontinuity. We do not, we dare not, go it alone. . . .[37]

There are several somewhat puzzling elements in this statement. Plaut was undoubtedly in favor of rabbinical guidance for congregants. He was, however, hesitant about what to call this guidance, suggesting both "mitzvah" and "hovah." Note, too, his unusual definition of mitzvah as "opportunity," which seems to connote choice, as well as his explicit statements promoting choice. In the next paragraph Plaut uses the word "obligation," but immediately softens its meaning with the addition of "we cannot accept the Halacha of tradition, but we must relate to it." The sum total of this statement seems to be more lenient than strict; guidance should take the form of persuasion rather than coercion.

Eugene Mihaly's speech was a poetic plea for the recognition of the validity, the "authenticity," of Reform Judaism. (We will have more to say about this exchange between scholars in our third chapter.) Here we will simply note the essence of Mihaly's argument, which was not opposed to the concept of halachah. In fact, Mihaly reiterated a phrase he had uttered previously before the CCAR, "there is no Judaism without Halachah."[38] Yet, Mihaly was not pre-occupied with the source of authority. He contended that modern rabbis must continue the ancient rabbinic tradition of responding to their own age.

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[37]W. Gunther Plaut, in "Religious Discipline and Liberal Judaism," CCARYB, 85 (1975) : 193-194.

[38]Eugene Mihaly, in "Religious Discipline and Liberal Judaism," 179. His reference is to his 1954 Conference address.

> The authority is the individual rabbi. By granting the individual dedicated Rabbi the authority to define "the way," we are risking--more, we are inviting--a gamut of responses and attitudes. But this is the price, or, as I perceive it, the reward of freedom. Some may call it hefkurut (anarchy)--another one of those emotive terms empty of content. Or it may be seen as a creative diversity. . . . The freedom of the individual Rabbi is viable as long as the essential context is present. The indispensable broad consensus is that we are all committed to face and to struggle with the historic Jewish experience as a significant factor in defining the Jewish "way." As long as that essential element is present, the response will be an authentically Jewish one.[39]

Rabbi Jack Stern, Jr., respondent in the debate, observed that both Plaut and Mihaly advocated a middle ground, including obligations and autonomy, imperatives and options. He sensed that there was not as much disagreement as agreement between the two positions. Plaut favored the voice of authority to emanate from the movement as a unified whole, while Mihaly preferred it to reside with the individual rabbi.[40]

By this time, 1975, there appeared to be consensus among most of the CCAR membership regarding some sort of plan for enhanced Jewish living. Some rabbis dissented with respect to the extent of the program, while others with the weight of individual autonomy "versus" the authority of Jewish tradition. Yet, they all seemed to agree that programs be produced to help Reform Jews integrate Judaism more completely into their lives and that it was their responsibility to "encourage" this type of programming. Except for a few isolated individuals, the rabbis favored neither total autonomy nor a fixed authoritative and binding code.

By the 1980's the matter seems to be more or less settled. An occasional argument against collective, "official" rabbinical guidance will still be heard, but this is surely not the norm. Most Reform Jews have accepted the idea of individual rabbinical guidance as one facet of the modern rabbi's job description. Much of the discomfort with traditional vocabulary seems to have vanished. Reform Jews speak freely of

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[39] Ibid., 174-181.

[40] Jack J. Stern, Jr., in "Religious Discipline and Liberal Judaism," 185-186.

mitzvot, presumably each with his/her own understanding of the term. As noted above, while the word "mitzvah" has become a commonplace, the Reform community still struggles with "halachah." Mitzvot have been accepted; halachah, Reform or otherwise, has not.

Increased, or at least enhanced, religious practice seems to be at the top of the list of rabbis' agendas for their congregants. The leader of Reform Judaism in America, UAHC president Rabbi Alexander Schindler, zeroed in on this aspect of Reform Jewish life in his 1987 Biennial address. He stated the need for American Reform Jews to "pursue the holy, for its quest defines our essential task as Jews." To meet this goal, Schindler urged embracing Judaism

> as a serious religious enterprise. . . a manner of living. . . an approach to the world that makes demands upon its adherents We must add meaning to label and substance to form; we must recapture the sense of totality in Judaism, the life built upon the performance of mitzvot, without surrendering the modern notion of personal autonomy that we have made our hallmark. The word mitzva must become habitual in our lives, no longer used only to describe a minor benefaction or our child's 13th birthday. For as Leo Baeck taught: 'Our deeds open up the gates through which the floods of the Divine enter human life.'[41]

Schindler equated a life of holiness with a life of mitzvot and advocated the notion of a fully Jewish life, but stressed the necessity of balancing these obligations with personal autonomy.

The movement as a whole presently appears to stress an "encounter with tradition," to use Eugene Borowitz's terminology, rather than a wholesale return. This position is very much in keeping with the historical Reform position of "process." The new emphasis, however, is on tradition as one (important and powerful, but nonetheless only one) source of authority. The freedom of the individual is confined by an obligation to confront the tradition.

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[41] Alexander Schindler, "Presidential Address," presented at the Fifty-Ninth General Assembly of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, held in Chicago. October 29-November 3, 1987, p. 14.

Much has changed within the Reform movement, but much has remained the same. Our task at present is to examine the documents produced by the CCAR collectively (as well as the work of several individuals) to determine their understanding of mitzvah and authority. We will begin with the platforms and then proceed to the guides, responsa literature, and rabbi's manuals. These documents articulate the different positions of the CCAR with respect to authority and mitzvah.

The Platforms

The Pittsburgh Platform (1885)

The appearance of the Pittsburgh Platform pre-dated the establishment of the CCAR by four years. It was never formally adopted as the official statement of the Reform movement, although it was incorporated into the philosophy of the movement. It has been universally accepted as the fundamental statement of Classical Reform Judaism. As such, the Pittsburgh Platform defined the position of the CCAR, at least formally, until 1937. That year the Conference adopted the next platform, the Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism, also known as the Columbus Platform.

The chief architect of the Pittsburgh Platform was Kaufmann Kohler, whose theology we discussed in Chapter One. It is appropriate to include here some of his rabbinical experience as background to the discussion of the platform, for surely it influenced his document. In addition, a familiarity with some of his positions will help in the understanding of the platform.

Shortly after he became rabbi of Temple Beth El in New York, Kohler met his match with the arrival in the United States of traditionally-oriented and anti-Reform Rabbi Alexander Kohut. Kohut was vehement in his criticism of Radical Reform. His blasts stimulated other conservative voices to be raised in opposition to Reform. In response, Kohler delivered a series of sermons later published in a

collection entitled Backward or Forward. In these sermons Kohler described his version of the difference between Orthodoxy, which he claimed looked backward and "subsistled] on the merits of our forefathers," and Reform, which looked forward, whose "golden era lies not behind but before us." The questions Kohler believed Judaism must answer included whether Jews must "observe all of the meaningless practices of the past" or whether they should "replace them by doctrines that are in keeping with the spirit of our age. Is Judaism to be only a sacred mummy, or a fountain of life?"[42] Kohler opposed what he called "Orientalism," his term for the refusal of Orthodoxy to recognize that, while truth began in the East, Western ideas were on a higher plane and set higher standards for life. Orthodoxy still adhered to the customs of the Orient:

> Orientalism characterizes its divine service and still shapes its marriage and divorce laws, its whole legal attitude to woman. Reform Judaism, on the other hand, insists on the recognition of the demands of Occidental cultures.[43]

The Pittsburgh Conference was called by Kaufmann Kohler largely as a result of his battle with Rabbi Alexander Kohut. His intention was to clarify Reform positions and unite Reform rabbis. He invited

> all such American rabbis as advocate reform and progress and are in favor of united action in all matters pertaining to the welfare of American Judaism to meet. . . for the purpose of discussing the present state of American Judaism, its pending issues and its regulations, and of uniting upon such plans and practical measures. . . .[44]

At the Conference of nineteen rabbis, Kohler delivered a paper in which he declared it time to rally Reform forces and consolidate, build. He stressed the need

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[42]Kaufmann Kohler, Backward or Forward, in Robert J. Marx, "Kaufmann Kohler as Reformer" (Rabbinic thesis, HUC-JIR, 1951), 39-42.
[43]Ibid., 42.
[44]"Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Platform," in Walter Jacob, ed., The Changing World of Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect (Pittsburgh, 1985), 91-92.

for promulgating a platform of principles to combat charges of anarchy and arbitrariness:

> . . . a platform broad, comprehensive, enlightened and liberal enough to impress and win all hearts, and also firm and positive enough to dispel suspicion and reproach of agnostic tendencies, or of discontinuing the historical thread of the past.[45]

Kohler submitted a tentative platform of ten points to a committee of five convened to decide the points which would be discussed and to classify them. Some minor changes were made. For example, the committee removed Kohler's reference to "divine revelation," and he objected. Discussion "settled" the matter with all recognizing that the problem was the ambiguity of the word itself, but all agreeing with "the principle of successive Divine revelation as an historical fact."[46]

Paragraphs three and four of the final document are of primary concern to us here.

> Third. We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.
>
> Fourth. We hold that all such Mosaic and Rabbinicial laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness, their observance in our day is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.[47]

Rejection of divine revelation and its concomitant authority left Reform with only subjective authority. The authors of the platform and the religious leaders of the time excercised this authority. The platform reflects this perspective by its use of the phrases, "We recognize" and "We hold." Thus, these paragraphs reflect the philosophies of the leaders of the time. The Reform rabbis of the late nineteenth

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[45]Ibid., 93-94.
[46]Ibid., 109-110.
[47]Ibid., 108.

century believed that Biblical legislation was intended for one particular time period only. It corresponded to what can be compared to the childhood of the Jewish people, and therefore no longer applied to Jewish life, as there was no longer a "national life in Palestine." Paragraph three states unequivocally that only the moral law of the Bible is to be regarded as binding. This type of legislation corresponded to the more mature stage in the development of Israel. This meant that much of Jewish tradition was understood to be primitive. Only the moral law was timeless and eternally valid.

Most important to the framers of the Pittsburgh Platform was the the Jew's spiritual elevation. Ceremonies which possessed the power to "elevate and sanctify" the human condition were welcomed; those which could not should be abandoned. The emphasis was on religion, to the exclusion of Jewish peoplehood or culture. This preference also may be seen in the prayerbooks and rabbi's manuals from the period. And, too, reason was held dear to the framers of the Pittsburgh Platform and their contemporaries. Practices regarded as irrational were discarded.

Paragraph four continued in the same vein. The Pittsburgh Platform made relevance the basic criterion for acceptance of any particular custom. Certain "Mosaic and Rabbinical laws" were declared "altogether foreign" to current standards and sensibilities and as hindrances to the spirituality of Reform Jews. Kashrut, for example, was best not observed. This paragraph is of particular interest both because it declares certain Jewish practices unimportant, even counterproductive, and because its tone is almost one of prohibition. The language is very strong in its opposition to traditional ritual behaviors. Of course, the movement has never considered itself to be a legislative body capable of imposing its will. This does not, however, diminish the importance of the tone of this document. It was influential in policy formation, production of liturgy, social action, and the

setting of ritual standards (e.g., circumcision for male converts) for the next 50 years.[48]

Some have understood the Pittsburgh Platform differently. Walter Jacob analyzed the Pittsburgh Platform and its influence one hundred years after its acceptance. He argued that, "although the American Reform rabbinate would not be bound by the rabbinic past, it would always consider it seriously and be guided by it. An antinomian stand was advocated by some, but the majority accepted halakhic guidance."[49] Phillip Sigal concurred. Looking at the Pittsburgh Platform from a Conservative viewpoint, Sigal maintained, "what the Pittsburgh Platform advocated in 1885 was well in accord with the historic halakhic process."[50] Regarding its position on the priestly and sacrificial system, he commented that the "Pittsburgh Conference was merely writing amen to history. . . . it is many years since the Conservative Movement looked aside at kohanim going to cemeteries, marrying divorced or converted women, and whether or not they are called first to the Torah."[51]

Despite what these commentators have said in retrospect about the platform, it did initiate a period of Reform history characterized by its disinterest in ritual, Jewish tradition, and ceremony. This position was never accepted unanimously, however, as indicated by Jacob: "Already by the fourth Conference (1893), it was possible for one rabbi to ask whether American Reform had gone too far. E.N. Calish questioned,

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[48]The CCAR never accepted the Shulchan Aruch and/or its commentaries as the authority in ritual matters. As stated in the Pittsburgh Platform, such legislation was no longer considered binding. For example, see discussions on the milat gerim question (CCARYB, 2 (1891-1892), 98ff, 114ff, 126ff).

[49]Walter Jacob, "The Influence of the Pittsburgh Platform on Reform Halakhah and Bible Study," in Walter Jacob, The Changing World of Reform Judaism, 33.

[50]Phillip Sigal, "Halakhic Reflections on the Pittsburgh Platform," in Walter Jacob, The Changing World of Reform Judaism, 42.

[51]Ibid., 45.

'Are we not in danger of making emancipated Judasim an emasculated Judaism?'"[52] Jacob observed that this was only the first time this question would be formally raised. Surely it would not be the last.

The Columbus Platform (1937)

We have already chronicled the changes in the movement in the years between platforms. It is obvious that sentiment in the movement had changed substantially by 1937 when the Conference met in Columbus, Ohio for its annual convention. A 1926 study, conducted by Marvin Nathan, showed a "trend away from the rational to the emotional and the mystic. The weakness of Reform," he noted, "has been its over-emphasis on the rational, the swing is now on back to the emotional, from 'rationalism to feelingism'" Nathan observed the tendency in lay people as well as the rabbinate: "There is a craving for something warm, definite, concrete--that appeals to the heart, that grips the soul. That there is a return to the customs and ceremonies in home and synagogue is evident on every side."[53] In 1934 the Committee on Resolutions at the CCAR convention called for a committee to study the changes since the Pittsburgh Platform and to present a "symposium re-evaluating the platform with a view of formulating a pronouncement touching the philosophy and program of present day Reform Judaism" the following year.[54] In 1936 Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon presented his proposed draft of the Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism. The platform was revised by a committee of six and adopted, although not without some difficulty. It was presented to the Conference with this preamble:

> In view of the changes that have taken place in the modern world and the consequent need of stating anew the teachings of Reform Judaism, the CCAR makes the following declaration of principles. It

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[52]Jacob, "The Influence of the Pittsburgh Platform," 32-33.
[53]Nathan study cited in Matz, "American Reform," 73-74.
[54]"Report on Committee on Resolutions," CCARYB, 44 (1934) : 132.

> presents them not as a fixed creed but as a guide for the progressive elements of Jewry.[55]

The Columbus Platform was divided into three parts: Judaism and its Foundations, Ethics, and Religious Practice. In contrast to the Pittsburgh Platform, the fact that religious practice was found worthy of an entire category is noteworthy. The first sub-section under the Religious Practice heading was entitled "The Religious Life." It read:

> . . . Jewish life. . . calls for faithful participation in the life of the Jewish community as it finds expression in home, synagogue and school and in all other agencies that enrich Jewish life and promote its welfare.
>
> The Home has been and must continue to be a stronghold of Jewish life, hallowed by the spirit of love and reverence, by moral discipline and religious observances and worship. . . .
>
> Prayer is the voice of religion. . . . To deepen the spiritual life of our people, we must cultivate the traditional habit of communion with God through prayer in both home and synagog.
>
> Judaism as a way of life requires in addition to its moral and spiritual demands, the preservation of the Sabbath, festivals, and Holy Days, the retention and development of such customs, symbols, and ceremonies as possess an inspirational value. . .[56]

It is worth examining the use of language in this platform, particularly as it compares to that in the Pittsburgh Platform. The rabbis of fifty years earlier had recognized their own authority in establishing the precepts of their work. In contrast, the Columbus document cites "Jewish life" and "Judaism" as sources of authority. Indeed we find the expressions, "Jewish life. . . calls for . . ." and "Judaism . . requires." And not only are these concepts cited as authoritative, they are given significant power. Note the choice of verbs: "calls for" and "requires" as well as "must" ("The Home. . . must continue to be. . . ."), all connoting obligation. The strength of this language informs us of the seriousness of the ideas.

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[55]Samuel S. Cohon, Jewish Theology: A Historical and Systematic Interpretation of Judaism and its Foundations (New York, 1971), 115.
[56]Ibid., 117-118.

If we compare the statements of the two platforms regarding ritual practice side by side, we will note both similarities and differences.

From the Pittsburgh Platform:	From the Columbus Platform:
. . . and today we accept as binding **only the moral laws** and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives. . . .	Judaism as a way of life requires **in addition to the moral and spiritual demands**, the preservation of the Sabbath, festivals and Holy Days, the retention and development of such customs, symbols and ceremonies as possess inspirational value. . . .

As a whole, the Columbus Platform projected a more positive attitude toward ritual aspects of Jewish life than did its predecessor. One of the indicators of this perspective was, in fact, the introduction of the term "Jewish life," especially as it "finds expression in home, synagog and school." The new platform advocated more than just spirituality and a religious life; Judaism emerged as a "way of life" for Reform. This terminology sets the general tone for the platform. In addition, the attitudinal shift it represents is significant and will ultimately be identified as one of the major influences of the Columbus Platform.

The rabbis of Pittsburgh declared that it was "we" (or more precisely, "they") who had the authority to accept or reject. In Columbus, the power of the assembled rabbis was transferred to the Jewish people, to Judaism. This change limited the freedom of the individual by delineating a boundary: a collective entity called "Judaism."

Columbus embraced both moral/spiritual and ritual matters, Pittsburgh favored spiritual. The extant positive feeling in the movement toward increased ceremonialism was thus reflected in the platform. However, although many critics have failed to point it out, the relevance criterion is still present in Columbus. Both platforms favor only such ceremonies which possess inspirational value (or elevate and sanctify our lives).

There is one word which marks the essential difference between the Pittsburgh and Columbus platforms: "requires." Columbus asserted that a meaningful Jewish way of life included requirements. The inclusion of this word points to a major attitudinal change for Reform. Note, however, that despite the strength of the word "requires," Columbus still did not use the more powerful term, "mitzvah."

Regardless of its actual wording, both the intentions behind it and the repercussions of the Columbus Platform were monumental. The adoption of this document was perceived as a watershed event in Reform Jewish history and development. It indicated new directions and priorities for the movement. Following the 1937 Conference, the CCAR Committee on Ceremonials, for example, launched into a fast-paced program of ritual and ceremonial development. The Committee on the Synagog and the Community in 1938 reported: "The time has come for the responsible leaders of Liberal Judaism to formulate a code of observances and ceremonies and to offer that code authoritatively to Liberal Jews."[57] While it would be many years before the CCAR was ready to sanction its own guide, the sentiment among (at least some of) the Reform rabbinate was already favorable. The Columbus Platform marked the definitive end of the classial period of American Reform Judaism, and ushered in the new age of Neo-Reform.

The Centenary Perspective (1976)

As the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion neared their one hundredth anniversaries, the movement sought to mark the events with the preparation of a new full-scale platform. In 1971 the Executive Board of the Union passed a resolution to this effect. The Board declared:

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[57]"Report of the Committee on the Synagog and the Community," CCARYB, 48 (1938): 64.

> It was moved and passed that we endorse the idea that the time has come for the Reform movement to take a new look at itself, its ideology, and its practices, and that the CCAR take the leadership in the preparation of a working paper toward a new platform for Reform Judaism: this is to be done with the UAHC and the HUC-JIR.[58]

But the movement found itself fragmented and fraught with tension, most notably in relation to the intermarriage issue, which almost split the Conference in 1973. The task was determined to be too great, and the project was abandoned. Eugene Borowitz differentiated between the would-be platform and the Centenary statement which was ultimately established: "The Centenary Perspective. . . sought to perform a far smaller task, retaining only the historical orientation of the previous effort."[59] Though it was no "small task," the committee decided to attack the fundamental difficulties which faced the Reform movement at the time. It aimed to emphasize the elements which united the members of the Conference. The goal was "as strong and as positive a response to [problems] as the overwhelming majority of the CCAR members would accept."[60] Despite all these obstacles, the end product was enthusiastically accepted by the CCAR membership at its 1976 Conference in San Francisco. And one writer has hailed it as "the centerpiece of Reform self-definition for the immediate future."[61]

The Centenary Perspective ultimately provided Reform Jews with a list of obligations, but it began with a definite stand favorable to autonomy. Under the heading "Diversity Within Unity--the Hallmark of Reform," the text states:

> Reform Jews respond to change in various ways according to the Reform principle of autonomy of the individual. . . . we stand open

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[58]Wolf, "Reform Judaism as Process," 77.
[59]Eugene B. Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today, Book One: Reform in the Process of Change (New York, 1978), xiii.
[60]Ibid., xiv.
[61]Michael A. Meyer, "Book Review: Reform Judaism Today, Vols. 1-3," Journal of Reform Judaism, 28 (Spring, 1981): 104.

> to any position thoughtfully and conscientiously advocated in the spirit of Reform Jewish belief. . . .[62]

In his commentary, Borowitz pointed out that this mention of "principle" is "the only such usage in the document."[63] The inclusion of this paragraph and its strong wording give testimony to the continuing tension between freedom and authority in the Reform movement. It also points to the diversity within the CCAR which provided the context for the statement. The Reform position viewed tradition as a guide, conscience as authority. "When conscience conflicts with Jewish law, Halachah. . . . Reform Jews feel it their duty--literally--to break with tradition "[64] The final position in the freedom-authority debate is that while autonomy is seen as a right, it must be "exercised within a Reform Jewish sense of God, the people of Israel, Torah, and our obligations." The statement calls for these twin Jewish values to be held in dialectic tension. "We must hold fast to them both and limit the expression of the one by our simultaneous concern for the other."[65]

At this point it becomes necessary to point out and examine the change in the terminology used to describe this dialectic. Whereas the tension had previously been referred to as the "freedom-authority" dialectic, the problem is now expressed in terms of autonomy and responsibility. Freedom and autonomy are related, with only a slight difference in emphasis. While freedom was never perceived to be limitless, the word "autonomy" acknowledges a degree of (self-) regulation. That is, individuals are free to regulate their own lives, but are expected to do so with attention and commitment to the Reform Jewish values of God, Torah and Israel. Thus, "autonomy" appears more frequently in the context of this discussion

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[62]Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today, Book One, xxi.

[63]Ibid., 94. Borowitz also points to the ten espousals of Reform's commitment to individual freedom within this paragraph of the Centenary Perspective. It is clear that the committee considered the recognition of autonomy as one of its highest priorities; see pp. 114-120. Individual autonomy, however, has certain limits. The Centenary statement lists six such limits; see pp. 123-131.

[64]Ibid., 96.

[65]Ibid., 133-136.

More significant is the appearance of words like "obligation" and "responsibility." Reform Jews have responsibilities--they are obligated to make certain choices, to incorporate certain Jewish values into their lives, both in theory and in practice. "Authority," connoting "control," has been replaced by the more positive concept of responsibility. Responsibility and autonomy both express the attitude that to be a Reform Jew means to take on certain responsibilities, to confront the tradition and to make decisions regarding practice based on this confrontation. Indeed, the committee designated "living the faith" and "study" as two duties "incumbent upon those whose lives are joined to religious tradition. . . . The Centenary Perspective may be said to follow in [the] rabbinic tradition by putting the two duties side by side when it says of Torah that its 'study is a religious imperative and [its] practice is our chief means to holiness.'"[66]

Borowitz called the subject of Reform religious duties the "most explosive" of any issue that faced the Centenary commitee. Although he contended that the consensus among Reform Jews was that Judasim included far more than ethics, the critical question was exactly how that attitude should translate into practice. That is, "What are Reform Jewish obligations with respect to religious practice, Israel and the Diaspora, universalism and particularism?" The Centenary Perspective confronts each of these areas within its text. The first category under the "Obligations" section of the document was devoted to religious practice. It reads:

> Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life, the means by which we strive to achieve universal justice and peace. Reform Judaism shares this emphasis on duty and obligation. Our founders stressed that the Jew's ethical responsibilities, personal and social are enjoined by God. The past century has taught us that the claims made upon us may begin with our ethical obligations but they extend to many other aspects of Jewish living, including: creating a Jewish home centered on family devotion; lifelong study; private prayer and public worship; daily religious observance; keeping the Sabbath

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66 Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today, Book Two, 141-144.

> and the holy days; celebrating the major events of life; involvement with the synagogues and community; and other activities which promote the survival of the Jewish people and enhance its existence. Within each area of Jewish observance Reform Jews are called upon to confront the claims of Jewish tradition, however differently perceived, and to exercise their individual autonomy, choosing and creating on the basis of commitment and knowledge.[67]

We look first to the portrayal of authority as it appears in this paragraph. The development of the movement's attitude on the subject is summarized briefly. The founders of Classical Reform stressed the divine origin of ethical standards, but historical events (at first, antisemitism; later, the Holocaust) proved it necessary for Reform Jews to live a more complete Jewish life. Thus, the Columbus Platform asserted that the Jewish people has authority over Reform Jewish behavior. The Centenary Perspective echoed this belief. Its opening words, "Judaism emphasizes" acknowledge that there is authority invested in the Jewish religion. There are certain things that Judaism means, and Reform Jews, as Jews, have certain responsibilities. Having said this, we must also note the reference to autonomy in the last sentence. At the same time that the statement takes a strong position regarding the importance of study, it acknowledges its commitment to autonomy. All Reform Jews are obligated to make educated choices, regardless of how those choices are ultimately expressed.

It is also interesting to compare the three platforms as they relate to the differences between ritual and ethical matters (called "laws" in Pittsburgh, "demands" in Columbus, and "responsibilities" in San Francisco.) The Pittsburgh Platform rejected most ritual laws on the basis of irrelevance. Ritual laws were intended for one time and place only; moral laws, on the other hand, were eternal. In addition, the emphasis in Classical Reform was on theology and spirituality. The second platform and the advent of Neo-Reform directed the movement toward an

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[67] Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today, Book Three, 15.

emphasis on ceremony. The Columbus Platform stated that some ceremonies were actually required, in addition to the moral and spiritual demands previously accepted by Pittsburgh. In the same vein, the Centenary Perspective allowed, "The past century has taught us that the claims made upon us may begin with our ethical obligations but they extend to many other aspects of Jewish living. . . ." The primacy of belief inherent in Classical Reform was rejected in the Centenary Perspective by the first sentence of the paragraph: "Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life. . . ." Critical also was the purpose of action as stated here. Action was considered to be the means by which Reform Jews should "strive to achieve universal justice and peace."

The Centenary Perspective did make religious practice a priority for Reform Jews, but as Borowitz cautioned, it was not to be confused with a guide to Reform Jewish practice: ". . . our brief statement could only lay down the general principles which might serve as the basis for such instruction."[68] Eight areas of ritual religious obligation for Reform Jews were specified in the Centenary Perspective. Perhaps in response to earlier fears of creating minimum standards by articulating certain practices, the Centenary statement prefaced its list with the word "including." Borowitz explained:

> No intimation is given that these eight are the only ones or officially regarded as the most important ones. While they seem central and quickly come to mind, the wording does not exclude those who feel that some other aspect of Jewish living is critical."[69]

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[68] Ibid., 12. But Borowitz does suggest that the religious obligation section of the Centenary Perspective "requires fulfillment by the creation of a literature which alone will make its suggestion practical. The CCAR's Shabbat Manual is a good start in this direction, and the areas specified in this section of the Centenary Perspective practically lay out a publication program." (See page 51.)

[69] Ibid., 36.

The first duty incumbent upon Reform Jews, as outlined by the Centenary statement,[70] was to create "a Jewish home centered on family devotion." Borowitz revealed that this obligation was added in response to feedback on an earlier draft which did not include it. With it included, the statement expressed the Reform rabbinate's ongoing commitment to the traditional ideal of the Jewish family in light of its contemporary challenges.

"Life-long study" was the second duty mentioned by the Centenary Perspective. As observed earlier, the ideal of study was primary to the authors. Only by study could a Reform Jew make informed choices about his/her Jewish life. The paragraph examined earlier, that pertaining to autonomy ("Diversity Within Unity the Hallmark of Reform"), delineated several limits to intellectual autonomy. One of these stated, "We stand open to any position thoughtfully . . . advocated . . ." The word "thoughtfully" indicated that Reform Jews were to use their minds, not just their consciences. Jews have an obligation to learn what the Jewish tradition has to offer.[71] Here we see evidence of commitment to the traditional Jewish value of Torah.

Both "private prayer and public worship" were listed among the obligations of Reform Jews. Private prayer addresses the spiritual needs of the individual; public worship is one way of acknowledging Jewish peoplehood--Israel--and unity.

"Daily religious observance" is a wide-open, yet highly significant category. Once again the movement expressed its commitment to the constant presence of Judaism and Jewishness in the life of Reform Jews. Borowitz explained this value:

> considering how our secularized life-style has tended to rob us of our humanity, we desperately need to bring some religious practice into our everyday activities to make unassailable our consciousness of our inalienable dignity founded in our being children of God. . . . The Centenary Perspective passes no judgment

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[70]There is no indication that the duties are arranged in order of priority.
[71]Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today, Book One, 124-125.

> on what sort of regular effort to maintain contact with the Divine is appropriate to all of us, but it does say that this is an aspect of Jewish piety which rightly lays a claim upon us.[72]

Borowitz's explanation is instructive. The Centenary Perspective states that it is a Reform Jew's obligation to establish a relationship with God. Never before had a platform spoken so bluntly about spirituality, even in the days of Pittsburgh when spiritual matters were of primary concern. "Obligations" presented earlier in the Centenary Statement have illustrated a focus on two of the three traditional Jewish values--Torah and Israel. Here we see evidence of the attempt to get Reform Jews to think about God in a serious manner as well.

Previous platforms cited the spiritually uplifting potential of holiday observance. San Francisco, however, made God an integral aspect of "keeping the Sabbath and the holy days," the sixth religious obligation listed in the Centenary statement.

> There has never been much question that Reform Judaism should observe the traditional Jewish calendar with its special days and weekly Sabbath. Yet if our obligations as Jews were primarily ethical, then one could easily substitute other times and activites for our customary Jewish observance. However, when God is basic to your life and, further, you live as part of the Jewish people, then its calendar and customs take on fresh importance. The holy days and festivals mark critical moments in the life of our people and its relation to God. . . .[73]

The traditional Jewish calendar was to be observed by Reform Jews: "other times and activities" were not to be substituted for "customary Jewish observance." This statement indicates Reform's allegiance to the concept of "Israel." Thus, Alvin Reines's view of Shabbat as a "state of being" is rejected under this "plank" of the statement. Reines contended that the values of Shabbat are more important than when or how it is observed. This means, for example, that Shabbat need not necessarily be observed on Saturday.[74] While Reines denied the peoplehood aspect

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[72]Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today, Book Three, 41.

[73]Ibid., 41-42.

[74]Alvin Reines, "Two Concepts of Shabbat: The State-of-Being-Shabbat and the Seventh-Day Shabbat," Journal of Reform Judaism, 34 (Fall 1987). Originally, "Shabbath as a State of Being," CCARJ, 14 (January 1967).

of holiday observance, the Centenary Perspective was dedicated to the value of Israel.

The Columbus Platform next called for "celebrating the major events of life" as a religious obligation for Reform Jews. Here again we observe the committee's consideration of traditional Jewish values, this time God and peoplehood. Borowitz's words elucidated this concern: "For a Jew, simhahs are enriched and tzorus made more bearable when shared with our people. God and peoplehood give the private events of our lives their true cosmic social context." Involvement with the synagogue and community were seen as two more ways for Reform Jews to "reach out to God and our people" as indicated by Borowitz.[75]

The Centenary Perspective concluded its list of religious obligations incumbent upon Reform Jews with this catch-all phrase: "and other activities which promote the survival of the Jewish people and enhance its existence." Jewish history has pointed to Jewish survival as a central religious obligation. What is instructive is that the Centenary Perspective indicated religious practice as the means to that end.

We have already noted the conclusion of the paragraph "Our Obligations: Religious Practice." After specifying areas of religious obligation, the text reversed its thrust to reaffirm the historical Reform value of individual autonomy. The authors acknowledged that the claims of Jewish tradition would be "differently perceived" by various individuals. The essential feature was the Reform Jew's recognition that the tradition does have legitimate claims to make on a Jew's life. The expression of these claims will vary with the predilections of the individual.

The last phrase of the paragraph sanctioned the validity of creativity in Jewish life. Creativity, grounded in Jewish learning, was welcomed by the Centenary Perspective. This concept was taken quite seriously, however:

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[75]Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today, Book Three, 43.

> our choosing and creating should be done on the basis of commitment and knowledge. . . . We are talking about religion, not a pastime, hence decisions need to be made seriously and on the basis of such depth of belief as a person can muster. Convenience and ease, are, in this context, minor considerations. Our criterion in every choice is: As one who shares the Jewish people's relationships with God, what constitutes my proper response to God? Our faith must guide our freedom.[76]

It is easy to see how very different this criterion is compared with the relevance required by the Pittsburgh Platform. And, once more, we discern God as the basis for obligation.

Summary

Each platform can be viewed as a product of its age, reflecting contemporary sensibilities and priorities. With respect to authority, we witnessed a shift in emphasis from reason, relevance, and morality to the gradual recognition of the authority inherent in the entity called "Israel." The other traditional Jewish values of God and Torah received increasing amounts of consideration, as well. The religious community in general in the U.S. has become more traditional, and these attitudes can most certainly be understood as a reflection of this trend. (We will examine these changes from a different point of view in Chapter Three.) We observed and offered explanations of changes in language and terminology which refect underlying attitudinal changes. Each platform became increasingly insistent about the claims that a Jewish life made on a Reform Jews. The Pittsburgh Platform did not even mention Jewish life. Columbus spoke of requirements of Judaism, and with the appearance of the Centenary Perspective in 1976, the movement was willing to speak of the obligations and responsibilities necessary for a Reform Jew's proper response to God. This difference between the Columbus Platform and the Centenary Perspective is subtle. That is, "obligations" are no less inisistent than "requirements." And the San Francisco statement makes no mention of mitzvah.

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[76]Ibid., 50.

Yet somehow the Centenary Perspective "feels" more traditional. It explicitly cites God as the metzaveh of the "ethical responsibilities." It does not, however, accord the same status to the "other aspects of Jewish living."[77] But there are implicit references to God as the metzaveh for ritual practices. In the paragraph outlining Shabbat and holy day opportunities, this statement appears: ". . . when God is basic to your life and, further, you live as part of the Jewish people, then its calendar and customs take on fresh importance. The holy days and festivals mark critical moments in the life of our people and its relation to God."[78] Similarly, the Centenary Perspective encourages participation in the synagogue and community as ways for Reform Jews to "reach out to God and our people."[79] The Centenary Perspective couples the authority of peoplehood Columbus required by Columbus with the authority of God.

In addition, the Centenary Perspective's more traditional "feel" is perhaps also attributable to the influence it has had. Since its adoption, the movement has moved closer to tradition than it has been since its earliest days in Europe.

The Guides

Introduction

The three platforms each laid a general theoretical foundation for the Reform movement; they did not deal with the specifics of religious conduct. Yet, there have long been those within the CCAR who have advocated the establishment of some kind of creed or guide for religious practice. In 1938 the CCAR Committee on Synagogue and Community resolved:

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[77] Ibid., 15.
[78] Ibid., 42.
[79] Ibid., 50.

> the time has come for the responsible leaders of Liberal Judaism to formulate a code of observances and ceremonies and to offer that code authoritatively to Liberal Jews.[80]

This call was defeated by the CCAR Executive Board in 1940.[81] There were more such false starts. In 1942, for example, the CCAR Committee on a Code of Practice recommended that "a Special Committee of the Conference be charged with the task of preparing a Manual of Jewish Religious Practice."[82] The Conference adopted the resolution but failed to fulfill its objective. In fact, the CCAR did not collectively produce a guide for religious practices and observances until the 1972 publication of Tadrich L'Shabbat, A Shabbat Manual. That guide was created by the CCAR Committee on the Sabbath, and was edited by committee chair W. Gunther Plaut. Once it completed the Tadrich, the committee evolved into the Committee on Reform Jewish Practice and produced Shaarei Mitzvah, Gates of Mitzvah in 1977 (Simeon J. Maslin, editor) and Shaarei Mo-eid, Gates of the Seasons in 1983 (Peter S. Knobel, editor). In the years preceding the appearance of these works, however, several guides were published independently by individual rabbis. Before examining the above-mentioned CCAR publications, we will analyze the individual works of Frederic A. Doppelt and David Polish (1957), and Morrison D. Bial (1967).[83]

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[80]"Report of the Committee on the Synagog and the Community," CCARYB, 48 (1938) : 65.

[81]"Report of the Recording Secretary," CCARYB, 50 (1940) : 30-31.

[82]"Report of Committee on Code of Practice," CCARYB, 52 (1942) : 123. During the forties and fifties many similar discussions were held under the purview of various committees. See, for example, Freehof, S., "Reform Judaism and the Halakha," CCARYB, 56 (1946), 276-317; "Report on Workshop on Changes in Reform Jewish Practice," CCARYB, 64 (1954) : 127; "Report of the Committee on the Purpose, Scope and Role of the Responsa Committee," CCARYB, 66 (1956) : 112ff, and "A Guide for Judaism," CCARYB, 69 (1959) : 264ff.

[83]See also Jerome D. Folkman, Design for Jewish Living: A Guide for the Bride and Groom, (New York, 1955); Abraham J. Feldman, Reform Judaism: A Guide for Reform Jews (New York, 1956); S. B. Freehof, Reform Jewish Practice and Its Rabbinic Background, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, 1944-1948), and Stanley R. Brav, A Guide to Religious Practice (Cincinnati, 1962)

We will include answers to the following questions in our discussion of each guide:[84]

- What was the purpose of the guide, as given by its authors?

- Who or what determined the contents of the guide? Are particular practices the product of Divine commandment, a collective (human) body, or popular consensus? What is included? omitted? What are the criteria used for inclusion or exclusion of particular customs or practices? Are all rituals equal? What is the means of determining which ones are the most important?

- If applicable, how does the guide define mitzvah, halachah, minhag? What attitudes do these definitions indicate?

- How do the authors perceive the role of ritual practice? Is it for dramatic effect? survival value? aesthetic appeal? as part of a covenantal agreement with God?

- Is the guide prescriptive or descriptive? Does it offer explanations for, or background on, suggested practices? How is "process" portrayed? That is, do the authors leave room for individual choice and/or creativity?

Doppelt and Polish (1957)

The preface of Frederic Doppelt and David Polish's A Guide for Reform Jews expressed the authors' intention to guide rather than to legislate. Theirs was not a code, and they understood the influence and effectiveness of their work to be limited by the individuals and groups which would "apply its principles to their own lives."[85] The authors conceived of Judaism as a way of life, in line with the Columbus Platform, the regnant philosophy of the time. Thus, they wrote the book "to help bring a greater degree of observance, self-disciplining commitment, and spirituality into our religious life. . . it is essentially a response to many who have been seeking guidance."[86]

In 1954 Frederic Doppelt spoke on "Criteria for a Guide of Reform Jewish Practices" in a workshop on Changes in Reform Jewish Practice at the Conference

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[84]Some of these questions were originally posed by Frederic Doppelt and David Polish, A Guide for Reform Jews (New York, 1957), 29-30.
[85]Ibid., vii.
[86]Ibid., 9.

convention. Doppelt addressed the problem of determining what should be practiced by Reform Jews, and therefore what should be included in a guide for religious practice. He rejected the criteria of aesthetic appeal, national survival, popular support and ethical ramifications. He stressed his belief that the contents of a guide should proceed within the framework of Jewish tradition, including Jewish ideology, methodology and even terminology. Doppelt cited mitzvah, halachah, and minhag as the three "lifegiving streams" which together "form the vast network of practices in Jewish life."[87] Doppelt also indicated that a guide should be undertaken by some individual rabbi or lay scholar. Accordingly, he and David Polish collaborated on A Guide for Reform Jews in 1957, which followed the philosophy outlined by Doppelt in his CCAR address. After Doppelt's death, Polish revised the guide in 1973.

Mitzvot were not understood as ritual, theology or ethics, but as possessing a unique and natively Jewish classification of their own. Mitzvot relate to spiritual encounters with God which the Jewish people experienced in the course of history. Moreover, it was through these encounters that the Jewish people grasped God's ethical will. Every time a Jew enacts a mitzvah, s/he renews that spiritual moment in Jewish history in his/her own personal life. Mitzvot are mandatory but they are to be obeyed, not because they are Divine fiats, but because "something happened between God and Israel."[88] This definition requires a perception which assigns profound spiritual value to historical events. Whether an event occurred exactly the way it appears in the Bible is not important; something did happen, and whatever it was inspired Israel's loyalty and devotion to God. Jews made these "holy moments" permanent "by incorporating them not into monuments of stone and marble and bronze but into specific and enduring life-acts known as Mitzvot."[89]

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[87]"Report on Workshop on Changes in Reform Jewish Practice," CCARYB, 64 (1954) : 126-127.
[88]Doppelt and Polish, A Guide for Reform Jews , 36.
[89]Ibid., 37.

The authors explain that the traditional blessing which accompanies mitzvot conveys the idea of the inherent sanctity of life and the divine imperative to which people are subject. Human beings achieve holiness only upon responding to the divine imperative--". . . asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, Who has sanctified us by His Mitzvot and commanded us. . . ." The blessing relates the idea that the same "something" which transpired between God and Israel continues to happen in every age and land.

> Mitzvot thus emerged from the spiritual womb of Jewish history. In our march across centuries of time, and as we struggled to know the will and understand the ways of God, we came upon moments when we stood in the very Presence of the Divine, face to face with God. These we proceeded to make permanent by incorporating them. . . into specific and enduring life-acts known as Mitzvot. Such life-acts, therefore, are not just ancient rites; they are rather spiritual arteries of life through which the Jew of every generation relives those historical and spiritual moments of commitment to God. What was only episodic becomes epochal, and what was only but a moment in Jewish history becomes eternal in Jewish life.[90]

A Guide for Reform Jews introduced the language, "It is a mitzvah to. . . ." The Hebrew Bible was given as the origin of the vast majority of those practices classed as mitzvot. Thus, according to Doppelt and Polish, mitzvot include having children, circumcising newborn boys, educating children and adults, and burying the dead according to Jewish tradition. The "traditional Reform" custom of Confirmation was also included as a mitzvah. Deuternomy 29:13-14 was cited as the source for this practice, "Neither with you only do I make this covenant. . . ."[91] The Deuteronomy prooftext ties Confirmation to a historical encounter between God and Israel, and therefore may be legitimately understood as a mitzvah in accordance with the authors' definition. Through the enactment of the mitzvah of Confirmation the covenant established between God and Israel at Sinai becomes integrated into the

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[90] Ibid., 36-37.
[91] Ibid., 64.

biography of every Confirmand. Likewise, the authors elevated a memorial service for the six million martyrs of the Shoah to the status of mitzvah:

> We would so propose, because it is an extension of the principle of Torah Mi-Sinai which, in our religious view, pertains to no specific calendar date and no geographic area. By Torah Mi-Sinai we mean that Torah comprises historically spiritual life-processes wherever and whenever the people Israel stands at Sinai and hears the voice of God.[92]

Halachot represent the second river of Jewish observance. As such, they "show the way one should go--specifically, as the accepted ways in which one should proceed to do the mitzvot."[93] Halachot provide the definitive procedures for the practice of mitzvot. In contrast to mitzvah, which obtains its basic authority from Jewish history, halachah emerges out of the deliberations of rabbinical authorities. Mitzvah is eternal; halachah changes out of necessity from age to age. Halachah

> cannot be made mandatory except by general acceptance and popular observance. But once it is in common usage, it remains in force as the religious way in which one should walk until such time when it is changed or substituted by the same democratic process through which it was established as the Halacha in Jewish life.[94]

The authors constructed their guide by first providing the mitzvah to be observed. They then listed halachot as the means by which to carry out the mitzvah. Halachot are generally Reform practices as they appear in the Rabbi's Manual, Union Prayerbook, and Reform responsa, all products of the CCAR, the accepted (Reform) rabbinical authority of the time. For example, a three-day "shivah" is recommended without mention of the traditional seven-day period.[95] The halachah regarding Kashrut is likewise Reform:

> Although Reform Judaism does not adhere to the traditional dietary laws, many Reform Jews still abstain from eating the meat of the

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[92]Ibid., 41.
[93]Ibid.
[94]Ibid., 42.
[95]Ibid., 83.

> pig. This is based on historical associations, since the pig was often used as an instrument of persecution of our people who were tormented by their enemies into eating it.[96]

It is interesting to note that Doppelt and Polish listed twenty-six halachot associated with the mitzvah of establishing and supporting the synagogue, the most halachot for any one mitzvah. Perhaps this is because the synagogue was the center of Jewish life at this stage of Reform development. Many of these halachot function to regulate the behavior of synagogue board members and officers.

The third stream of Jewish religious observance is minhagim. These were defined as "the folk-customs and folkways which have their source in the creative activity of the people themselves and not directly in any deliberative and organized body." Minhagim are subsidary to mitzvot. Their authority is derived from the "social force of common usage among the people."[97] Minhagim are considered only customary and therefore optional, or are rejected altogether. In fact, many of the listed minhagim are categorically not recommended. For example, many minhagim, especially those associated with death, mourning and funerals are deemed "a matter of custom only," "no longer required and need not be observed," or even "superstitious rites [which] should be discouraged." The attitude of the authors regarding these matters was in line with Reform thinking and practice of the time.

Doppelt and Polish contended that religious practice had always been an integral part of Reform Judaism. The Pittsburgh Platform spoke of ceremonies as capable of elevating human existence, but just "did not see fit to spell out, in concept and in application, a program for meaningful and creative observance."[98] The authors of A Guide for Reform Jews provided this program, convinced that Reform had entered a new phase:

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[96]Ibid., 90.
[97]Ibid., 44-45.
[98]Ibid., 4.

> [Reform] must come to grips more seriously and more systematically with the problem of Jewish practice and observance. . . . Comtemporary religious thought tends to stress the role of ritual in the shaping of the spiritual life, and contemporary Jewish thinking keeps stressing the need of day-to-day observance in the preservation of Judaism in particular.[99]

Thus the authors view the role of ritual as answering, in addition to the theological mandate of covenant fulfillment, sociological needs of spirituality and survival.

The Doppelt and Polish guide is prescriptive in tone. Intended as a guide rather than a code, it nonetheless delineates certain practices, mitzvot, as mandatory. One may critique the guide by measuring it against its own standards. In the introduction Doppelt and Polish suggest ways in which to keep a guide "Reform" as opposed to "allowing" it to become "Orthodox." A guide will remain Reform if it rises out of a Reform point of view:

> If a Guide simply reconstitutes traditional observances, it is Orthodox in both spirit and content; but if it reconstructs them, revaluating [sic], eliminating and developing, it is a continuation of the living stream of Reform Judaism. For what determines whether a custom, ceremony or symbol is either Orthodox or Reform is not its observance or non-observance; it is rather the right to change it when necessary, to drop it when no longer meaningful, and to innovate when desirable. . . . if it is revised from time to time to meet changing conditions and rising needs, it will be an expression of Reform Judaism. . . .[100]

A Guide to Reform Jewish Practice does prescribe Reform thinking regarding the proper method of observing mitzvot, encouraging and discouraging halachot and minhagim as necessary according to the criteria stated above. As such, it can rightfully be called "Reform." Despite this effort, the book rarely offers explanations for practices beyond the fact that the Reform movement has sanctioned them. It skips the step of "re-evaluating," describing only the ultimate liberal reconstruction. The guide provides little or no room for creativity, innovation, or Reform process. Where traditional practices are excluded the authors

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[99]Ibid. 29.
[100]Ibid., 9.

neither suggest alternatives nor leave options open to readers. In addition, an occasional practice, which is contrary to some Reform theology, is included without explanation. For example, mourners are instructed to utter, "Baruch dayan ha'emet" at the death of a loved one. While this custom is line with absolute theism, Jews with less traditional God-concepts would find it objectionable. The absence of theological discussion is sorely apparent in instances such as this. In these respects, the guide fails to live up to its own requirements.

The 1973 revision of A Guide for Reform Jews reflected the spirit of Reform in the seventies. In the preface to the updated version, Polish indicated the differences between it and the first edition. This edition reveals an increased stress in several areas. "The years and the Jewish experience," wrote Polish, "have sharpened the need for ever deeper response to the tradition. Thus, the second day of Rosh Ha-Shanah is no longer overlooked; a chapter on Conversion is added, marriages on Tisha B'av are definitely discouraged. . . ."[101] Polish also mentioned the increasing "need for a mitzvah-system and for the restoration of the tradition." The concept of a "mitzvah-system" was advocated by Gunther Plaut in connection with A Shabbat Manual, which was published just prior to the revised version of the Doppelt and Polish guide.

The revised edition lessens somewhat the earlier version's emphasis on spirituality. For example, in the first edition, Jews are encouraged to "attend services to seek God's blessing." The later version provided a different objective for synagogue attendance: ". . . to commit himself to his faith and his people."[102] In the 1973 guide the stress was on total involvement in a Jewish way of life.

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[101]Doppelt and Polish, A Guide for Reform Jews (revised edition, New York, 1973), v-vi.

[102]See page 66 in the first edition, page 67 in the second. See also recommendations for college students, instructed in 1957 to seek out a congregation to "share in its spiritual life," and in 1973 to "share in its life" (page 67 in both editions).

The second edition of the Doppelt and Polish guide is comparatively closer to tradition. Practices previously designated minhagim (for weddings and Shabbat, for example) have been elevated to the status of halachah. This is because the practices in question had become accepted by the Reform rabbinate, the authority for determining halachah according to the Doppelt-Polish system. For example, the huppah was encouraged in the second edition where it was only acknowledged in the first.

It should be noted that the Shabbat section is greatly expanded in the later edition. In fact, the mitzvah itself contains an additional four elements. The 1957 treatment of Shabbat consisted of one section, including one mitzvah, seven halachot and three minhagim. In 1973, six sections included the original mitzvah plus its four expansions, twenty-four halachot and six minhagim.

David Polish's 1973 additions testify to his commitment to Reform process. He successfully re-evaluated and adapted A Guide to Jewish Practice to "meet [the] changing conditions and rising needs" in the Reform movement of the seventies.

Morrison D. Bial (1967)

Morrison David Bial offered his guide, Liberal Judaism at Home: The Practice of Modern Reform Judaism, to "help Liberal Jews determine what is customary Reform practice, especially as it affects them personally." He intended neither to legislate nor to limit individual responsibility, which he called the "touchstone of the Liberal Jew."[103] The preface to the book defined its purpose: "to present the practices of Liberal Judaism in relation to the accepted norms of traditional Judaism. No one until now has attempted to juxtapose traditional practice to Liberal practice and to

[103]Morrison D. Bial, Liberal Judaism at Home: The Practice of Modern Reform Judaism (Summit, New Jersey, 1967), 1.

explain how they differ. This book will try to make explicit to the layman that which has too often been vague and unstated."[104]

Bial did not use the word "mitzvah." However, he defined the word in the Glossary this way:

> Commandments. According to the Talmud, there are 613 mitzvot in the Torah which each Jew should obey. . . . The word mitzvah has taken on additional meaning, so that it often connotes a good deed as well.[105]

Bial's work is descriptive, first presenting traditional practice, then normative liberal practice, without ever using "mitzvah language." He makes general statements like, "Orthodox Jews do. . . " and "Most Reform Jews do not. . . ." Bial rarely declares that a Reform Jew should or should not do a particular thing.

Bial stated that the final criterion for observance by a Liberal Jew was kedushah, holiness; "that which will help him sanctify his life, to make it truly meaningful. By this he must live, and it will help give his life that inner meaning by which we seek fulfillment."[106] It is presumed, then, that most traditional customs were not meaningful for Reform Jews. Indeed, this attitude was expressed in some of Bial's descriptions. For example, in introducing Tashlich, Bial remarked, "Traditional Jews have a custom which is strange to most Liberal Jews." And, Bial called the custom of changing a dying person's name to confuse the angel of death a "superstition" which "has no place in Liberal Judaism."[107]

As a book of information, Bial's guide provides helpful explanations for traditional customs as well as the reasons Reform Jews have accepted or rejected the same. An example of the latter is the author's explanation of Tisha b'Av:

> Liberal Judaism has deemphasized Tisha b'Av more than any other holiday. It is not that we do not mourn for the loss of life and the

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[104]Ibid., n.p.
[105]Ibid., 152.
[106]Ibid., 6.
[107]Ibid., 110 and 66, respectively.

> wretchedness of our people after these twin tragedies [the destruction of the two Temples]. We do. But most Reform Jews feel that the Temple destroyed by the Romans had become a symbol of archaic usages. . . . there is relatively little or often no observance of this day of mourning in Liberal Judaism.[108]

The book does offer some room for Reform innovation. This is due in large part to the guide's descriptive rather than prescriptive tenor. Bial, for example, lists several Passover Haggadot which Reform Jews might use, implying that these would be more in line with contemporary sensibilities than the traditional text.[109]

Tadrich L'Shabbat, A Shabbat Manual (1972)

In 1959 Robert Kahn moderated a CCAR symposium on a Reform guide. He asked, "Shall any sort of official body of Reform Judaism issue any sort of official pronouncement as to the way in which Reform Jews might or should act?"[110] The question was answered 13 years later when the movement collectively published A Shabbat Manual. In its final form, the manual did, in fact, tell Reform Jews how they should act. But the publication of this book was preceded by seven years of consideration and discussion. The acceptance of A Shabbat Manual in 1969 marked the first time in its 83-year history that the CCAR voted to publish a guide to Reform Jewish practice.

In 1965 W. Gunther Plaut spoke before the CCAR on "The Sabbath in the Reform Movement." The speech itself was a historic event, for not since 1937 had Shabbat been on the agenda of the Conference. Plaut's stated intention was to attempt to define "a liberal, realizable Sabbath for our time."[111] Plaut's presentation

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[108]Ibid., 140.

[109]One of the quirks of Bial's book, for which the present author can find no explanation, is the inclusion of family purity laws, shatnez, and shaving prohibitions under the category of Kashrut. While it is possible that Bial understood the term "kasher" in its broad sense, that of "acceptable" or "proper," this section is still odd.

[110]"A Guide for Reform Judaism," CCARJ. 8 (June 1960) : 35-36.

[111]W. Gunther Plaut, "The Sabbath in the Reform Movement," CCARYB, 75 (1965) : 186.

accomplished three goals: (1) he presented the Sabbath as a "concept and experience" in Reform, (2) he proposed the establishment of a permanent Sabbath committee to define goals for the observance of Shabbat, and (3) he proposed the creation of a guide. The CCAR agreed to commission a Committee on the Sabbath to hold meetings and seminars and to conduct surveys and pilot studies. The results of the preliminary work suggested to the committee that a guide was in order, precisely as Plaut had, in fact, suggested in 1965. Perhaps the committee felt the need to approach the idea of a manual with prudence, coming to its own conclusion regarding the appropriateness and acceptability of a guide to prevent a challenge by the Conference. If CCAR members felt as if the decision had been made prior to a thorough study of the matter, they might have protested.

According to editor (and Committee Chair) W. Gunther Plaut, A Shabbat Manual

> represents an effort on the part of the CCAR to create old/new opportunities for Jewish living. It is also a major attempt of the Reform rabbinate to deal directly with Reform Halacha in specific form, with guidelines responsive to the needs and realities of Diaspora life.[112]

There are several elements of this paragraph worthy of note. Plaut's use of the expression "old/new" reveals his commitment to Jewish tradition. It is clear from this introduction that the manual would include traditional Shabbat practices. At the same time, the word "new" promises Reform innovation and a recognition of Reform "process." In addition, Plaut's bold reference to "Reform Halacha" is significant. As mentioned earlier, many Reform rabbis were hesitant to speak of halachah for Reform Jews. Gunther Plaut, however, was not one of those. The editor of this manual, and the chair of this most important Conference committee, apparently perceived the guide as some sort of Reform Halachah. Yet, the conception of halachah presented here is more akin to guidance than to law. He, in

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[112]W. Gunther Plaut, ed., "Editor's Introduction," in CCAR, Tadrich L'Shabbat, A Shabbat Manual (New York, 1972), iii.

fact, used the word "guidelines." The new halachah is thus not synonymous with the old. It is not binding; it is gently persuasive.

The Conference focused its attention on Shabbat as the central experience in the life of Reform Jews. This is no doubt attributable to the influence of Gunther Plaut's 1965 presentation and the agenda of the committee he chaired. In truth, however, Shabbat had always been a primary value in Reform Judaism. All three platforms contained statements regarding the importance of Shabbat. The innovation of the late Friday evening service, for example, was an effort to save Shabbat. The manual provided historical background on Shabbat and described its contemporary status. Modern developments eroded the traditional concept and practice of Shabbat. Yet, modernity also provided the opportunity to re-enhance Shabbat for Reform Jews. Nazism, the destruction of European Jewry, and the State of Israel all altered the thought patterns of Jews. There was a greater sense of peoplehood and personal obligation. Moreover, economic developments had increased the leisure time of most modern Jews, thereby suggesting the possibility of new Shabbat observance. The manual attempted to channel the potential of these developments toward a revitalization of Shabbat.

One of the innovations of A Shabbat Manual was its definition of mitzvah. However, upon examining all the components of this definition, one finds vagueness and some major inconsistencies, making difficult a complete understanding of the philosophy behind the use of the word. This problem, it turns out, was deliberately created. In an article following the publication of the guide, Plaut attempted to shed some light on the committee's decisions with respect to the definition of mitzvah. He explained that after considering the matter for a long time, the committee "decided to utilize the term mitzvah without grounding it precisely, so that no one would be

locked out from meaningful observance. The formulations therefore are purposely, and not accidentally, vague."[113]

The Tadrich introduced mitzvah as "what a Jew ought to do in response to his God and to the tradition of his people." Correspondingly, this admonition appeared on the next page:

> You must always remember that you are performing mitzvot. It is not a question of 'how you feel about it' at any given time. You may not be 'in the mood." But being a Jew is not always convenient or easy. The performance of mitzvot ought to be the pattern of one's life.[114]

This definition implied a certain degree of obedience to God or to the Jewish people, yet, at the same time the manual acknowledged the element of choice:

> This response comes from personal commitment rather than from unquestioning obedience to a set of commandments which past tradition thought to be the direct will of God. By making choice and commitment part of our plan of life, we willingly and purposefully strengthen our bonds with the God of Israel and with His people.[115]

Plaut elaborated on the choice factor in his 1973 CCAR Journal article: "Mitzvah is. . . more than folkway or ceremony. As we choose to do a mitzvah. . . we choose the way of duty, of self-discipline, and of loyalty."[116] A Shabbat Manual recognizes that at some point mitzvot depend on choice, not blind obedience to traditional practice. Yet, mitzvot may not be left entirely to personal mood. The confusion is inherent in the commitment of the manual to both mitzvah and choice.

The manual's official definition of mitzvah obligates the Reform Jew to both God and the Jewish people. This suggests that the guide advocates God and/or Israel as the metzaveh, the one who stands behind the commandment. And, as we have argued, the individual, at least to some degree, shares this position of authority. Yet,

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[113]W. Gunther Plaut, "Observance and Commitment," CCARJ. 20 (Fall 1973) : 42.
[114]CCAR, Tadrich L'Shabbat, 8.
[115]Ibid., 7.
[116]Plaut, "Observance and Commitment," 42.

the Tadrich does not elaborate or clarify the issue of metzaveh. Plaut suggested four possibilities in his 1973 article, "each of which would reflect concepts presently held by members of our movement." Plaut included neither the individual nor the Reform movement or its institutions in his list.[117]

(1) The metzaveh is God whom we meet in an existential sense in the act of doing the mitzvah.

(2) Mitzvah arises out of the Sinaitic Covenant which is the source of the commandment.

(3) The metzaveh is the Jewish people.

(4) The metzavveh is Jewish tradition.

It may be argued that the omission of these options from the Tadrich was a mistake. A discussion of the metzaveh would have provided material essential to the development of the reader's commitment.

Before proceeding with the contents of the guide, we note one more discrepancy with regard to the word "mitzvah." The glossary definition does not agree with the one provided in the text: "what a Jew ought to do in response to his God and to the tradition of his people." According to the glossary, mitzvah is a "'commandment'; perfomance of an act of distinctive Jewish quality often accompanied by a blessing."[118]

In his 1965 Conference address, Plaut expressed his conception of a completely Reform approach to Shabbat. The goals of the committee he proposed must always remain within a Reform context:

> Our goals must be meaningful in the context of Reform Jewish life. We do not aim at the recreation of the traditional Sabbath. Both the theological and sociological foundations of such a return have disappeared. Our goals must reflect the devotion and imagination of our movement as well as the springs of tradition. We will have to choose those elements from the wealth of past Sabbath treasures

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[117]Ibid.

[118]CCAR, Tadrich L'Shabbat, 100.

which may serve as the ingredients for a new and viable structure[119]

With this goal in mind, we will examine the contents of the manual.

Tadrich L'Shabbat listed five major purposes for Shabbat observance.[120]

(1) Awareness of the world--"remembrance of creation"

(2) Commitment to Freedom--"a memorial of the exodus from Egypt"

(3) Identity with the Jewish People--to remember and celebrate the covenant.

(4) Enhancement of the Person--rest is more than abstention from work. It is "a condition of the soul, a physical and spiritual release from weekday pressures."

(5) Dedication to Peace.

All five of these purposes are in keeping with traditional and spiritual conceptions of Shabbat; the emphasis is not on ritual observance. While none of these principles is antithetical to Reform philosophy, neither is there the inclusion of anything uniquely Reform.

A "Catalogue of Shabbat Opportunities" was presented, including seven positive (Mitzvot Aseh) and six negative mitzvot (Mitzvot Lo Ta-aseh). The manual used the language introduced by Doppelt and Polish, "It is a mitzvah to. . . ." The seven mitzvot aseh included family preparation for and celebration of Shabbat, lighting candles, reciting or chanting Kiddush, Motzi, Birkat Hamazon, attending worship services, "enjoying the special quality of Shabbat throughout the afternoon" and reciting Havdalah. It was considered a mitzvah not to engage in gainful work, perform housework, go shopping, attend social or other public events during worship hours or participate in any activity "which violates or gives the appearance of violating Shmirat Shabbat."[121]

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[119]W. Gunther Plaut, "The Sabbath in the Reform Movement," 186.
[120]CCAR, Tadrich L'Shabbat, 5-6.
[121]Ibid., 10-11.

Upon reflection, it may be seen that this catalogue, particularly with respect to the prohibitions, is traditionally oriented. There are no Reform innovations offered. The last-mentioned mitzvah against mar'it ayin, for example, had not previously been a part of mainstream Reform philosophy. As such the book appears to violate Plaut's original (1965) intentions by mimicking a traditional Shabbat. In addition, readers of A Shabbat Manual were not provided with the criteria for the mitzvot that were included or for those which were not. Explanations are limited to whether or not a particular practice is in keeping with the spirit of Shabbat. These factors combine to produce a conception of Shabbat that is quite legalistic. This tone is continued in the section of "Questions and Answers" based entirely, both questions and answers, on Jewish law. Questions include, "Who should light Shabbat candles?", "What is the proper hour for lighting candles?", "Is it not contrary to Jewish tradition to hold late Friday evening services?", and "Is the Torah reading on Friday night a violation of Jewish law?" [Emphasis mine.] Solomon Freehof's answers were in accordance with Jewish tradition.

The manual did attempt, if somewhat inconsistently, to accommodate the Reform principle of process. The preface stated:

> Each individual and each family will decide where and how to begin, and what and how much to do to make Shabbat an essential rhythm of life. Our shared faith in God, our love of the Jewish people, and our devotion to the Torah tradition give us a common base from which to start. The use of the following pages now depends on you.[122]

This process, of course, depends on an assumed consensus regarding a shared faith in God and love of the Jewish people, etc. In addition, as mentioned above, because the book did not include Reform innovations, or even an invitation for individual creativity, process was limited. That is, it may have been exercised only to the extent

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[122]Ibid., 1.

that practices presented by the manual were incorporated (or not) into one's Jewish life.

In his introduction, Plaut referred to "Reform Halacha." Neither the concept nor the word, however, was used in the text of the book.[123] Rabbi Steven J. Peskind criticized the manual in a 1974 CCAR Journal article. He asked:

> In defining the concept of mitzvah, Dr. Plaut admits the word "Halachah" was "intentionally avoided in order not to enter into controversy over both the term and the concept in the context of Reform Judaism." Isn't this just a "cop-out?" If our own Shabbat Manual cannot enter such a controversy, where can we deal with it?[124]

Peskind's question is a good one. We have already noted several problems with the word "halachah." Our next chapter will attempt to understand some of the causes of the controversy surrounding it.

In 1971, with Tadrich L'Shabbat approved and awaiting publication, W. Gunther Plaut wrote about a division within the movement:

> [A] division in the movement [exists] between those who believe that in order to have a meaningful future Reform must return to some sort of Halacha, and those who find this either no problem at all or one of negligible proportion. With the appearance of the Shabbat Manual this Fall, this issue can no longer be avoided. Halacha has made its re-entry into the official fold of our movement. Some of our men will probably wonder how we passsed the Manual in the first place, but there it is. And if some of us can help it, this will only be the beginning. . . .[125]

It was only the beginning. At the 1972 post-convention meeting of the Executive Board of the CCAR, it was moved that the Sabbath Committee take on a new name and expand to tackle issues associated with general Reform religious practice. The motion was seconded, but tabled. By the 1973 convention, however, the Secretary's report indicated that the Committee on the Sabbath had become the Committee on

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[123]The glossary defined halachah as the "way to go" or "Jewish law," p. 101.
[124]Steven J. Peskind, "A Dubious Service," CCARJ, 21 (Summer 1974) : 93.
[125]W. Gunther Plaut, "New Directions for Reform Rabbis," CCARJ, 18 (October 1971) : 24-27.

Reform Jewish Practice. With the establishment of this committee, the Conference moved into its next phase of development.

Shaarei Mitzvah, Gates of Mitzvah (1979)

Gunther Plaut's report on the Committee on Reform Jewish Practice for 1973 indicated that the committee had devoted most of its attention to a discussion of the desirability of further guides for Reform Jews. The result was unanimous agreement on the immediate creation of what tentatively would be called a Life-Cycle Guide. By the 1975 convention the Committee had produced a draft of Gates of Mitzvah: A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle, and in 1976 a revised version was submitted to the CCAR for approval.

It was mentioned earlier that the Centenary Perspective set the stage for the establishment of a guide to religious practice. The Gates of Mitzvah can be considered this guide. The paragraph on religious practice from the Centenary Perspective appeared at the very beginning of Gates of Mitzvah, thus grounding the book firmly within contemporary Reform philosophy. The Centenary statement, in essence, justifies the publication of the Gates of Mitzvah. The foreword, written by Gunther Plaut, provided more rationale for the book's publication:

> The publication of this book proceeds from the knowledge that Judaism was never meant to be merely an institutional religion. Its ultimate focus remains the individual, in personal observance and personal deed, at home and at work. Our religion urges us, on our journey from life to death, to give continual expression to our belief in God and in the significance of our membership in the historic people. This volume aims at helping each individual Jew to make Jewish decisions in his or her life. It sets out guideposts for making such decisions, the rest is up to each person.[126]

Plaut's remarks reflect the spirit of the Centenary Perspective in that they indicate a desire for Reform Jews to establish a Jewish frame of reference, to live a life

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[126]W. Gunther Plaut, "Forward," in Simeon Maslin, ed., Gates of Mitzvah (New York, 1979), n.p.

which is influenced in all aspects by Judaism. The comment is also favorable to process. The guide may help people get started, but it is only a guide. The individual must work to incorporate its contents into his/her life.

The Gates of Mitzvah was also written "to help searching Jews rediscover the treasure of mitzvah which is theirs." This all-encompasssing lifestyle, however, was not intended to prohibit individual freedom. The authors emphasized the responsibility of individual, educated choices:

> Gates of Mitzvah was conceived to help Jews make Jewish responses, to give their lives Jewish depth and character. . . . Reform Judaism maintains the principle of individual freedom; each Jew must make a personal decision about the Judaism which has come down through the ages. Nevertheless all Jews who acknowledge themselves to be members of their people and its tradition thereby limit their freedom to some extent. . . .[127]

Acknowledgment of Reform allegiance to the twin values of autonomy and responsibility was also realized by the inclusion of four essays on the meaning of mitzvah, which were considered in the first chapter of this thesis. The inclusion of four divergent views was intended to show readers of the guide the "breadth of possible interpretations and hopefully [move them] to formulate their own basis for living Jewishly."[128]

"Mitzvah" is called the "key to authentic Jewish existence and to the sanctification of life" in the introduction to the book. The "definition" continues:

> Its root meaning is 'commandment,' but mitzvah had come to have broader meanings. It suggests the joy of doing something for the sake of others and for the sake of God, and it conveys still more: it also speaks of living Jewishly, of meeting life's challenges and opportunities in particular ways.[129]

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[127]Maslin, Gates of Mitzvah, 4.
[128]"Report of the Committee on Reform Jewish Practice," CCARYB, 86 (1976), 59.
[129]Maslin, Gates of Mitzvah, 3.

No firm definition of mitzvah is provided; the essays suggest four different ones.[130] The thread running through the philosophy presented in the introductory material of the guide, however, is one of integration. That is, the movement, since adopting the Centenary Perspective, favors integrating Judaism and Jewishness into all aspects of a person's life. "Mitzvah" is the key; Gates of Mitzvah is the guide.

The authors of Gates of Mitzvah were forthright in their explanation of the criteria used to determine the contents of the book. They did "what they hoped all Jews do," they studied the tradition and then made choices with regard to existing mitzvot. If they felt the tradition was still applicable and meaningful for the age, they endorsed it strongly; if not, they rejected it. The authors were particularly open to suggesting alternative mitzvot when the tradition did not treat men and women equally. Yet, the point of departure was consistently the tradition, those mitzvot that had remained within the Jewish people throughout the generations.

The book included chapters on Birth, Childhood and Education, Marriage and the Jewish Home, and Death and Mourning. It also contained a Notes section, including "Sources and Elucidations," the four theological essays, and an Appendix of essays on a wide variety of topics (for example, "A Jewish View of Sexuality," "Kashrut: A Reform Point of View," and "The Admission of Converts.").

Each of the main chapters began with an introduction including Biblical background, midrashim and other traditional texts, and modern Jewish beliefs. The language of mitzvah, as introduced by Doppelt and Polish, and incorporated into A Shabbat Manual, remained in use in Gates of Mitzvah. The text offers a full range of mitzvah opportunities, most often consistent with what has been considered "standard" Reform practice. The book is undeniably more demanding than those

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[130]Note, however, the Glossary definition of "mitzvah" as "a commandment or good deed," p. 154.

which preceded it, but the tone is always one of gentle persuasion rather than compulsion.

Gates of Mitzvah does live up to its promise of creating Reform tradition where necessary. Several examples of "new mitzvot" are examined here. In accordance with the authors' views on sexual equality, they suggest the "new mitzvah" of a brit service for girls: "It is a mitzvah to bring daughters as well as sons into the berit."[131] It is also called a mitzvah to test for genetic diseases prior to marriage, "in keeping with the fundamental Jewish principle of the sanctity of life." The source provided for this "mitzvah" is the CCAR resolution urging Tay-Sachs testing.[132]

It is also instructive to note what is not considered a mitzvah. One significant example is Kashrut. The guide calls Kashrut a "tradition," and stated

> For some, traditional Kashrut will enhance the sanctity of the home and be observed as a mitzvah; for some, a degree of Kashrut . . . may be meaningful; and still others may find nothing of value in Kashrut.[133]

The reader is directed to the appended essay on Kashrut, and urged to study the question, as Kashrut has been central to Jewish life for centuries.

The direction of this entry is totally in keeping with the philosophy of the book. Reform Jews are urged to confront the tradition, study it, and then make decisions. What has been meaningful to Jews throughout history may not be mandatory for practice, but it is for study and contemplation. The only problem may be in what is termed a "mitzvah" and what is not. The inconsistency and vagueness, while intentional, tends to be confusing. Why is Tay-Sachs testing a "mitzvah" and Kashrut not?

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[131] Ibid., 15.
[132] Ibid., 30. See also footnote 41, p.76.
[133] Ibid., 40.

One of the strengths of this book is the Notes section. It was provided to allow the use of Gates of Mitzvah as a source of information. The introduction to the Notes states its purpose: It was intended for those for whom "it will not be enough to read that a Jew should do this or that; they will want to know why. What is the source of the mitzvah? How does Reform practice differ from traditional practice and why?" The elucidations and explanations allow the reader to capture the essence--the "tamtzit"--of the mitzvah.[134] Traditional textual sources are cited, and the origins of customs are included. But explanations of Reform practice are often incomplete. For example, regarding the minyan at a house of prayer, the note says: "While Reform Judaism does not require the presence of a minyan for the recitation of Kaddish or any other prayer, it is appropriate that a minyan be assembled whenever possible."[135] The reader is left wondering why Reform Judaism does not require a minyan, and if that is so, why it is "appropriate" to assemble one. This "explanation" is inconsistent and potentially confusing.

On the whole, Shaarei Mitzvah is a noble attempt at a guide to Reform Jewish practice. The task is inherently difficult, for there is a multitude of factors which must be considered and dealt with. The book lacks unity due its pluralistic commitment to include as many conceptions of mitzvah, and to be as comprehensive, as possible. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to determine the priority of the mitzvah opportunities presented within its pages. It possesses strength as a reference and as a means for providing Reform Jews the opportunity to add meaning to their lives with Judaism and Jewishness.

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[134]Ibid., 67.
[135]Ibid., 95.

Shaarei Mo-eid, Gates of the Seasons (1983)

As early as 1977 the Committee on Reform Jewish Practice announced its intention to create a companion to its life-cycle guide with a volume on the Jewish holidays. They also sought to update the decade-old A Shabbat Manual. The result of their efforts was Gates of the Seasons: A Guide to the Jewish Year.

This guide, like its predecessor, was designed to help Reform Jews make their lives more Jewish. Gates of the Seasons and Gates of Mitzvah emerged out of the same Centenary paragraph. (The passage on the Reform Jew's obligations to religious practice appears in a prominent spot at the beginning of the book.) What the first volume provided in the way of guidance for life cycle events, the present work did for the holiday cycle. The introductory material on the Jewish Calendar included the committee's intentions in creating this guide: "As Jews living in the Diaspora, two calendars regulate our lives, the civil and the Jewish. For us the days, the months, and the years bear two dates and two distinct rhythms. This volume. . . is designed to help Jews feel more clearly the flow of Jewish time." The book was "conceived to help Jews make Jewish responses and to give their lives Jewish depth and character."[136]

Like Gates of Mitzvah, Gates of the Seasons is based on the premise of mitzvah, without providing a definition of the term. The holiday guide also stresses the importance of mitzvah as "the key to authentic Jewish existence and to the sanctification of life."[137] In one place the philosophy expressed in Gates of the Seasons bears a distinct resemblence to that in the Doppelt and Polish guide. The authors of Shaarei Mo-eid stated that the mitzvot provide

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[136]Peter S. Knobel, ed., Gates of the Seasons (New York: 1983), 5-6.

[137]Ibid., 6. Note, too, that the Glossary definition does not agree with the one provided in the text. This Glossary, like that of Gates of Mitzvah, defines "mitzvah" as "'Commandment.' Good deed, religious duty," p. 177.

> rich opportunities to transform the ordinary into the sacred. The mitzvah of Shabbat and the festivals sanctify certain days by linking them to significant moments in Jewish history or to important Judaic concepts.[138]

Particularly striking are comments in this volume related to the criteria of selection employed by the authors. Simeon Maslin, chair of the committee which produced the guide, made standard references to the philosophy of Reform that encourages old/new practices which enrich life and discourages ones which are no longer meaningful. In this context he noted the dual commitment of Reform to both autonomy and obligation:

> In this book. . . certain ancient practices are recommended and others are not. . . . Those customs of long-standing which still have meaning and which add beauty and Jewish depth to our lives should be observed. But, as Reform Jews, we have every right to discard practices which have lost meaning for contemporary Jews and which lack an aesthetic dimension.[139]

Maslin's terminology is instructive: Reform Jews "should" observe practices that they find meaningful. In contrast, they "have the right" to discard others. With these remarks, Maslin added a new perspective to the choice process. First Maslin challenged Jews to make Judaism the primary factor in their lives: "We must never forget. . . that we are first and foremost Jews, related to four thousand years of Jewish history and related to thirteen million Jews the world over." Then Maslin linked the primacy of Jewish identification with religious observance:

> Therefore, the burden of proof must always be on those who want to abandon a particular tradition, not on those who want to retain it. Without strong links to the vast body of Jewish tradition, we may be good people but we are certainly not good Jews capable of transmitting Judaism to the next generation.[140] [Emphasis in original.]

These words seem to be directed at Classical Reformers, skeptical of the changes in the Reform movement, and therefore more inclined to reject than to accept Jewish

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[138] Ibid., 13.
[139] Ibid., viii.
[140] Ibid., viii.

tradition. Maslin's words are pointed, for not only does he speak of survival, but he makes a value judgment on the "good-ness" of a Jew.[141] While individual autonomy is as valued as it ever was, the burden of proof is now placed on those who wish to abandon practices, rather than on those who wish to keep them. This idea is consistent with Borowitz's contention that dissent is acceptable only after an encounter with tradition.

Gates of the Seasons perpetuates another longstanding Reform principle, that of process. Gates of Mitzvah encouraged its readers to begin anywhere; the important thing was to begin to live Jewishly. The present volume presents the same philosophy. The introduction ends with this admonition:

> The edifice of Jewish living is constructed of mitzvot. As a building is constructed one brick at a time, so is a significant Jewish life. Our sages recognized that the observance of one mitzvah leads to the observance of others. As Ben Azzai said: 'One mitzvah brings another in its wake.' [Mishnah, Avot 4.2] The secret of observing mitzvot is to begin.[142]

An innovation not found in previous guides, was that Gates of the Seasons included Hebrew translations of all entries in the table of contents. This, coupled with the inclusion of Hebrew terms for all practices (as in Gates of Mitzvah), suggests an effort by the Reform movement to incorporate Hebrew terminology into the vocabularies of Reform Jews. Shaarei Mo-eid contains explanations and guidelines for the observance of all Jewish holidays, in accordance with the philosophy expressed in the introduction regarding the consideration of all that is within Jewish tradition. Thus, the guide includes the traditional, but not necessarily "Reform," holidays Tu B'ishvat, Rosh Chodesh and Tisha b'Av. Minor fast days are mentioned, but their significance is dismissed: "Reform Judasim takes no special

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[141] Note the irony here. This message is conveyed through words corresponding almost verbatim to a statement found in the Pittsburgh Platform. The wording there was: "we. . . maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization."
[142] Maslin, Gates of Mitzvah, 6.

note of these days in its liturgy and, in general, Reform Jews do not observe them." Similarly, Tashlich is described as an option, but not encouraged.[143]

The explanations and descriptions, especially as enhanced by the extensive footnotes, are thorough and generally positive in tone. The guide includes details and how-to instructions for various customs, including the lighting of Chanukah candles and the practice of Bedikat Chametz.

One of the most notable aspects of Gates of the Seasons is the section on Shabbat, which represents a revision of the catalogue of Shabbat opportunities listed in A Shabbat Manual. The updated version reflects the changes undergone by the movement in the ten years subsequent to the publication of the first guide. Three aspects of Shabbat--joy (oneg), sanctity (kedushah), and rest (menuchah)--were presented as purposes of Shabbat observance in the Manual. In Gates of the Seasons, these appear as mitzvot. Likewise, blessing of the children by parents is called a "sacred custom" in 1972; in 1983 it is a mitzvah.[144] Bikur Cholim on Shabbat also achieves mitzvah-status in Gates of the Seasons, whereas Tadrich L'Shabbat includes it as an activity worthy of the special quality of Shabbat afternoon.

Shaarei Musar (in process)

Over the years, many Reform rabbis have expressed the desire for a Reform guide to ethics. In 1977 the Committee on Religious Practice projected the creation of this type of guide in conjunction with a guide to the holidays. In 1982 the committee reported that it felt a volume on ethics was necessary, "so as not to compromise the Reform emphasis on ethics over mitzvah."[145] This comment, uttered by committee chair Simeon Maslin, is instructive, for it suggests that ethics is not mitzvah. This may, of course, be due to a lack of clarity in expression, for

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[143]Ibid., 104-105 and 121 respectively.
[144]A Shabbat Manual, 22; Gates of the Seasons, 27.
[145]"Report of the Committee on Religious Practice," CCARYB, 92 (1982) : 194.

Reform Jews have always considered high ethical standards mandatory. It is likely that Maslin simply meant "ritual" when he said "mitzvah." It is not uncommon, however, for laypeople to use "mitzvah" to mean "ritual" alone.

The foreword to Gates of the Seasons mentions the guide to ethics:

> With these two volumes [Gates of Mitzvah and Gates of the Seasons] . . . we have by no means exhausted the possibilities for mitzvot within our Jewish tradition. We have not even touched upon the vast field of ethical mitzvot--business ethics, family ethics, medical ethics, etc. We look forward to the publication someday soon of a volume on ethics from a Reform Jewish point of view.[146]

Despite the ongoing commitment to ethics, at first even emphasized over ritual, the Reform movement has yet to publish a guide to ethics. This fact is of major significance, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Summary

The guides published by individuals and by the CCAR itself differed with respect to content. They were all philosophically similar, however. All reflected the particular decade in which they appeared. As such, the guides grew increasingly favorable to tradition. Yet none of the guides claimed authority; each described itself as "only a guide." Eugene Borowitz made this observation with respect to the CCAR volumes:

> [The guides] have been acceptable to the broad membership of the Conference because no one disputes their lack of authority. For all that they may speak of their contents as mitsvah, commandment, or be called by their enthusiastic proponents Reform halachah, they bind no one. They are resources for rabbis and lay people to utilize in full personal freedom.[147]

All the guides described above are excellent enabling tools. That is, they provide Reform Jews with the opportunities for making their lives more religiously and

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[146]Knobel, Gates of the Seasons, viii-ix.
[147]Eugene B. Borowitz, Liberal Judaism (New York, 1984), 329-330.

spiritually fulfilling. Bial's Liberal Judaism at Home, and the Conference publications Gates of Mitzvah and Gates of the Seasosns are also particularly successful as sources of information, explanation, and elucidation. As the Doppelt and Polish volume and A Shabbat Manual lack sufficient explanative and informational material, they are less helpful as references. Earlier publications (Doppelt and Polish and Bial) were descriptive in nature. Later, the "official" products of the Reform movement tended more toward encouragement and persuasion.

The Responsa Literature

Thus far our analysis has been of specific and discrete pieces of literature. In contrast, our approach to Reform responsa will be as a body, or type, of literature. Solomon B. Freehof is by far the most prolific author of responsa in the recent Reform period, although the Reform movement has possessed a rabbinical Committee on Responsa for many decades.[148] The procedure has always been that a legal question (she'elah) is posed (usually by a rabbi), and then the committee or a representative of the committee provides an answer (teshuvah), related to Jewish tradition. Freehof served as the chair of the CCAR Responsa Committee for over twenty years. In 1976 he reported that the number of she'elot was increasing steadily, with the committee receiving between 150 and 200 each year: "Our men want to know increasingly what is the reaction of our historic legal literature to the problems which confront them."[149]

Freehof employs a wide spectrum of sources as the foundation for his answers, including Bible, Talmud, Mishneh Torah, the Shulchan Aruch, Rashi, the Tosafot,

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[148]These responsa cover a wide variety of topics and have been published in numerous volumes. See, for example, Walter Jacob, ed., American Reform Responsa (New York, 1974), a collection of responsum from previous publications.
[149]Solomon B. Freehof, Reform Jewish Practice, augmented edition (Cincinnati, 1976), 6.

Aruch haShulchan, the Maggid Mishnah and other halachic commentators and respondents. In the end, however, his answers often reflect the spirit of the age, and/or his own opinion. Freehof counters criticism of his work with respect to this procedure by pointing out, correctly, that traditional respondents "took cognizance of contemporary events and acknowledged as much. We must at least conclude that the traditional posekim, too, lived in their world, and were knowingly influenced by it."[150]

Freehof explains his conception of the Reform interest in responsa, and the rationale supporting his use of sources:

> The Reform movement which had based itself first of all primarily on the Bible, now realizes that God spoke to Israel likewise through its many centuries' devotion to the study of the law. We are seeking a reunion with that grand expression of Jewish thought and feeling which is embodied in the vast Halachic literature.[151]

Despite this "reunion" with the Halachic literature, Freehof acknowledges that his work has no binding quality. This attitude reflects a most untraditional understanding of "halachah." In his own, frequently stated terms, it is merely "advisory." In addition, Freehof also routinely completes a teshuvah with an invitation for the respondent to come to his/her own decision. The intention of course, is that if the reader will read the entire answer, and not just the permissive conclusion, the decision will be made from an informed perspective. Freehof's chief purpose is to "describe present day Reform Jewish practices and the traditional rabbinic laws from which they are derived."

Freehof stressed the ethical and sociological aspects of the responsa process. He believed that we are not likely to adopt the "ceremonial prohibitions, the restrictive negatives to the law, except, of course, those of direct moral impact." We are more

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[150]Kenneth J. Weiss, "Freehof's Methodology as a Reform Jewish Halachist," Journal of Reform Judaism, 32 (Summer 1985) : 58

[151]Freehof, Reform Jewish Practice, 6.

likely to accept, not the full list of positive commandments, "but one might say folk commandments, Minhaggim that have emerged from the life of the people and are dear to the people. . . . We are strengthening our folk feeling. We are 'seeking brethren.'"[152] This explanation for acceptable Reform Jewish practice conflicts with those offered and endorsed by other influential Reform thinkers, like W. Gunther Plaut.

At this juncture, it is necessary to note that much of Freehof's work is controversial. His use of the term "halachah" as advisory, his method of constructing responsa, the very fact that he chooses to do it, what it means, and its "legitimacy" or "authenticity" (that is, its "worth," in the minds of his critics), may all be challenged. The entire issue of the tension between Reform and halachah, expressed most acutely in the responsa literature, requires extensive examination. The discussion of these important matters is more appropriately deferred, however, to the next chapter.

The Rabbi's Manuals (1917, 1928, 1961, 1988)

The services contained within the rabbi's manuals present accurate reflections of contemporary Reform theolological notions and attitudes toward practice. They are, in effect, the movement's way of ensuring that certain principles and values are conveyed, and certain rituals practiced. We may thus observe changes in emphasis and understanding regarding mitzvot and ritual practice by analyzing these publications.

The first rabbi's manual was entitled Minister's Handbook, reflecting the contemporary custom of referring to rabbis as ministers. This is a direct adaptation from the American church. Eleven years prior to the eventual publiation of the

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[152]Solomon B. Freehof, Contemporary Reform Responsa (Cincinnati, 1974), 5.

manual, a debate ensued in the CCAR convention on the advisability of including a section listing a number of halachot to serve as guidance for Reform rabbis, especially the younger ones.[153] The Committee on the Minister's Handbook had recommended that two of the most learned Reform rabbis, Kohler and Deutsch, formulate a number of halachot, "or laws," for inclusion in the handbook. Kaufmann Kohler said,

> I must declare the responsibility for the unfortunate term, "Modern Halakot." When the contents of the proposed Minister's Hand Book were discussed in the committee I suggested that for the guidance of young rabbis certain rules should be stated which govern Jewish practice in modern Reform congregations in opposition to the ancient Orthodox or traditional practice. . . . In view of all these uncertainties, I suggested that an elucidation of the principles of reform in connection with a statement of the functions of the modern rabbi be presented in the Hand Book; not, however in the spirit of legislation, but in the spirit of guidance. I am the very last to propose a new book of laws, but I insist that there be a clearer system and certain guiding principles in the practice of the modern rabbi. Neither Dr. Deutsch nor I want to dictate. We want simply to counsel and to assist those who request enlightenment."[154]

The halachot were ultimately omitted. The report of the handbook committee in 1914 includes an interesting passage:

> It will be noted that the Committee's manuscript in its entirety adheres as closely as practical to tradition. In the preparation of each service contained in this manuscript various rituals of the conservative synagog have been consulted.[155]

Kohler felt that this "spirit of conservatism" would be unacceptable to "at least half the members" of the Conference.[156] He provided sharp criticism of the manuscript, calling elements of it "more popish than the Pope himself," and moved to defer its acceptance. He did not feel the book was true to Reform principles

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[153] CCARYB, 16 (1906) : 58ff.
[154] Ibid., 60.
[155] "Report of the Committee on Minister's Handbook," CCARYB, 24 (1914) : 57.
[156] Ibid., 58.

Others agreed, and the manuscript was rejected. Rabbi Stolz remarked that "It may take twenty more years, but eventually we will have the Handbook."[157]

The manual was finally published in 1917, and underwent revisions in 1928 and 1961. The newest edition is scheduled for publication in May, 1988. (For purposes of comparison, however, the draft version of 1985 was consulted.) In general, we note obvious trends toward tradition in subsequent revisions. This is apparent in the ceremonies included in each edition. The Minister's Handbook of 1917 includes twenty services or prayers. There are services for many public events, such as the laying of a synagogue cornerstone and the consecration of a new home, as well as public services for the newly married and the critically ill. There is a circumcision ceremony and a Confirmation service. The 1928 revision, now entitled Rabbi's Manual, added prayers for the betrothed, an afternoon service at a house of mourning and a dedication of a Sefer Torah.

Preceding publication of the 1961 manual, a survey of the Conference membership indicated a desire for more variation in services, especially for marriages and funerals. This is perhaps due to the frequency with which rabbis performed these particular ceremonies; they needed fresh approaches to avoid tedium. The members also requested naming and B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies, a marriage service for elderly couples, Pidyon ha-Ben and a cremation service. The Pidyon ha-Ben and B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies were not included, but all other requests were accommodated.

The most recent manual reflects the many changes undergone by the movement in the last seventeen years. There is an increased use of Hebrew, a distinct attempt at providing choice (in both style and content, similar to that begun in Gates of Prayer), and the inclusion of several new prayers and services. For example, there

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[157]Ibid.

is a brit ceremony for girls, a conversion service with prayers for the mikveh, and a prayer to be recited upon making aliyah. There is also the addition of a ceremony for first-born babies, of both sexes, at thirty days. We will compare the treatment of four ceremonies, circumcision, marriage, conversion and rabbi's installation, in the different manuals, noting especially the portrayal of mitzvah in each.

Circumcision

This custom has remained virtually unchanged from 1917 until 1985. In fact, the most marked difference is with respect to translation of the traditional blessing recited before mitzvot. The first three versions translate, "asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav" as "Who has sanctified us by Thy commandments and enjoined upon us the rite of circumcision." In 1985 the translation of the blessing appears as "by whose Mitzvot we are hallowed, who has given us the mitzvah of circumcision." (p. 6) The latest interpretation leaves the Hebrew for the word "mitzvah" untranslated, a practice which began with Gates of Prayer. This serves to reinforce the concept of mitzvah, one of the stated intentions of the movement. At other points in the service, "mitzvah" is substituted for the "law" used in previous editions.

We must acknowledge another aspect of the translation of the blessing. The words "given us" denote the new premium placed on responsibility in contemporary Reform theology. The commandments are given to Reform Jews, who are then obligated to fulfill them. How they choose to do so is a matter of individual choice.

The 1985 volume also includes a brit ceremony for girls (p. 12). This is identical to the one for boys, with the omission only of the circumcision portion. The blessing calls it a mitzvah to bring girls into the covenant of the people of Israel. This is in accordance with the egalitarian philosophy expressed in Gates of Mitzvah:

> It is a mitzvah to bring daughters as well as sons into the berit. Reform Judaism is committed to the equality of the sexes, and in

consonance with this principle, parents should arrange a berit service for girls either at home or in the synagogue.[158]

Marriage

With respect to mitzvah, the only change made in the wedding ceremony in nearly seventy years is the one mentioned above for circumcision. That is, in 1985 the translation of Birkat Erusin includes the untranslated Hebrew word "mitzvah." (pp. 27-28) While both the 1928 and 1961 versions contain the Hebrew blessing, the Minister's Handbook includes solely the English. Of course, as would be expected, more traditions are included with each revision. The latest version also contains a substantial amount of choice in material to be used.

Conversion

The 1917 conversion service mentions neither Torah nor mitzvot. With the giving of the name, the rabbi is instructed to say, ". . . with this name as token you are now a member of the household of Israel and have assumed all rights, privileges, and responsibilities." (p. 35) "Responsibilities" in 1917 meant fulfilling the Mission of Israel.

There were no mentions of Torah or mitzvot in the 1928 version, either. But, this manual does include the V'ahavta, in both English and Hebrew (p. 35), which mentions the Jew's obligation to live by the commandments. The prayer is translated using "commandments." The above-mentioned admonition for the convert to assume rights, privileges and responsibilities is repeated here (p. 36).

The 1961 version includes only the English of the V'ahavta, and no mention of rights, etc.

The most recent version contains some interesting innovations. A new question is added to the list asked the convert: "Do you commit yourself to the pursuit of Torah

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[158]Maslin, Gates of Mitzvah, 15.

and Jewish knowledge?" (p. 103) This question, and the inclusion of the responsive reading beginning, "The Torah of God is perfect. . . ," (pp.103-104) reflect a positive attitude toward the primacy of Torah in the life of a Jew. A service for immersion at the mikveh contains the blessing, ". . . who has hallowed us by mitzvot and commanded us concerning the rite of Tevila." (p. 110) The inclusion of the service for the mikveh indicates a strong tendency toward tradition which does not necessarily reflect common practice; it is not the practice of all Reform rabbis to insist upon mikveh for conversion purposes. One may assume that the authors of this manual intend to encourage Reform rabbis to ask prospective gerim to consider, if not accept, this ritual.

Installation of Rabbis

Two manuals include services for the installation of a rabbi. These are noted here because of the emphasis in the latter on Torah. In 1928 it is suggested that the rabbi's installation take the place of the Torah reading on Friday evening, or the Haftarah reading on Shabbat morning. An optional opening prayer asks God to "reveal unto [the rabbi] the wonders of Thy Torah." (p. 133) The 1985 configuration (pp. 117-126) takes place before the Torah service, and includes the passing down of the Torah from generation to generation. This ritual is accompanied by the words, "Moses received the Torah at Sinai. . . the Torah has been passed down to our own time." The inclusion of this phrase emphasizes the importance of Torah, but begins with a notion contrary to Reform theology. These words also appear in Gates of Prayer, where some have understood them to be (even originally) intended as metaphor. A responsive reading calls upon the congregation to pray: "Let the Torah be the soul of all his/her teaching. Let him/her teach us mitzvot, sacred deeds, a way of life." This passage is a clear reflection of the primacy of mitzvot, and

the desirablity of Judaism as a way of life. The rabbi, in his/her installation, receives the responsibility of transmitting these values.

General Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the relevant publications by individual rabbis and by the CCAR itself. We have noted substantial changes in attitude: a new commitment to an integration of Judaism and Jewishness, a renewed sense of obligation, a positive approach to mitzvah, an increased tolerance in the idea of halachah. We have offered some explanations for this change in viewpoint, but our understanding is still limited. What factors account for such a significant attitudinal change? And, what may account for the inconsistencies and ambivalences? Our next chapter attempts to explore the root causes of the evolution by focusing on sociological and psychological theories regarding attitude change. The theories will be applied to issues discussed throughout this thesis, in an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the specific changes in the Reform movement.

Chapter Three

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS

We have observed rather significant examples of attitude change, inconsistency, and confusion with respect to ritual mitzvot in the American Reform movment throughout its history. Some aspects of the change are stubbornly inexplicable, even after theological and historical analyses. The body of psychological literature known as consistency theory tries to make sense of such attitudinal changes. The basic premise of cognitive consistency theory states that individuals are motivated to maintain or achieve consistency in thought and behavior. Generalizing from the individual to a group, we may assume that this holds for religious ideas as well as for anything else. We would therefore expect the various elements in a religious philosophy to form a consistent belief system.[1] Evidence presented in the first two chapters suggests that this is not the case with Reform Judaism. Surely one would expect changes in a religious system in the course of over 100 years, yet time itself does not create change. Something or some things have changed within the minds of Reform thinkers. We turn to these psychological theories for some additional insight into the changes undergone by the Reform movement in America.

Because consistency theory postulates that people are uncomfortable with inconsistency, and are motivated toward achieving consistency in thought, attitude change may be understood as the result of perceived inconsistency in thought by an

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[1]Reform Judaism has historically stressed the freedom of the individual. The argument presented in this chapter proceeds from the assumption by the present author that basic concepts in a religious system (e.g., God-concept, understanding of revelation, definitions of key words like "mitzvah") should be consistent. This idea stems from the concept of "elegance" in a theory. That is, the more elements that may be explained by a theory, the more "elegant" that theory. Elegance and consistency are thus interrelated. Generalizing to the realm of religious philosophy, one would expect to find a certain elegance or consistency with respect to the various elements in that religion. Reform has not achieved this type of consistency.

individual (or group). A simple change in attitude serves to eliminate the inconsistency. The best known of the consistency theories, cognitive dissonance theory, was put forth by Leon Festinger in 1957 in a book entitled, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. We will survey the major points of Festinger's theory, consider some other consistency theories, and then look briefly at related theories of conformity and social influence. Then we shall attempt to apply some of the psychological explanations of attitude change to developments within the Reform movement.

Literature Review of Cognitive Consistency Theories

At the root of cognitive consistency theory is the assumption that individuals possess, and desire to possess, systems of belief and attitudes which are internally consistent. In fact, it has been postulated that the human need for consistency functions as a motivating factor, much like hunger or thirst. Just as people are motivated to reduce hunger by eating, so are they inclined to reduce inconsistency in thought. Inconsistency is "uncomfortable," so people will attempt to reduce or eliminate it.

In 1960 William McGuire tested the hypothesis that people have a drive for consistency. By changing one premise in an experimental subject's belief structure, McGuire consequently changed that person's higher-order beliefs which were founded on that premise. He attributed this result to a tendency to move toward consistency. The experimental subject could not maintain incompatible elements within one syllogism. A change in one belief necessitated a change in another. McGuire also showed that persuasive messages were more effective if they attempted to push the individual's belief toward greater consistency than toward

inconsistency.[2] Research has even suggested that individuals need not be aware of their inconsistencies to be motivated toward consistency.

Festinger introduced the terms "consonance" and "dissonance" to replace "consistency" and "inconsistency," respectively, terms he considered to be more neutral. Consonance and dissonance refer to types of relations between pairs of "elements" in cognition, "elements" being the things a person knows. Two elements are consonant if they fit together, dissonant if they do not. Festinger's formula for the existence of dissonance is: "Two elements are in a dissonant relation if, considering these two alone, the obverse of one element would follow from the other. . . . x and y are dissonant if not-x follows from not-y."[3] If individuals are predisposed to favor consonance, how and why does dissonance arise? Why do people find themselves doing things that do not fit with what they know or believe, or having some opinions which do not correspond to their other opinions? Festinger offers two possibilities for the introduction of dissonance. New events may happen or new information may become known to a person, creating at least a momentary dissonance with existing knowledge, opinion or cognition. It is true that people will try to avoid situations and information which could potentially increase their dissonance, but no one has complete control over the environment. Festinger contends that the existence of dissonance is therefore an everyday condition:

> Very few things are all black or all white; very few situations are clear-cut enough so that opinions or behaviors are not to some extent a mixture of contradictions. . . . where an opinion must be formed or a decision taken, some dissonance is created between the cognition of the action taken and those opinions or knowledges which tend to point to a different action.[4]

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[2]W. J. McGuire, "A Syllogistic Analysis of Cognitive Relationships," in C. Hovland and M. Rosenberg, eds., Attitude Organization and Change (New Haven, 1960), 25.
[3]Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Stanford, 1957), 13.
[4]Ibid., 5.

Festinger's statement indicates that dissonance is possible, even likely, with every decision one makes. Dissonance would be expected to be greatest where the chosen alternative contained unfavorable, as well as favorable, elements, and the unchosen alternative included attractive factors in addition to unattractive ones. The less clear-cut the choice, then, the more the potential for dissonance.

Festinger identified other sources from which dissonance may arise. One example is from logical inconsistency. If a person believed that it was possible for people to live on the moon, but also believed that there is no way to supply oxygen on the moon, that person would hold two dissonant cognitions. The obverse of one belief follows from the other on logical grounds in the person's own thinking process. Dissonance may also be created because of cultural mores and/or out of past experience.[5]

Festinger contends that it is nearly impossible to avoid dissonance: "For almost any action a person might take, for almost any feeling he might have, there will most likely be at least one cognitive element dissonant with this 'behavioral' element." And, the magnitude of this dissonance will be directly proportional to the importance of the two elements. Obviously, the more these elements are valued by the person the greater the degree of dissonance.[6]

In 1962, after receiving criticism from other researchers, Festinger added another element to his theory. He accepted the idea that commitment was tied closely with post-decision dissonance. This means that simply making a decision will not necessarily produce dissonance; the person must be committed to his/her decision and its possible consequences. According to Festinger, commitment "unequivocally affects subsequent behavior."[7]

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[5]Ibid., 14.
[6]Ibid., 16.
[7]Leon Festinger, "Behavioral Support for Opinion Change," Public Opinion Quarterly, 28 (1964a): 404-417.

The theory postulates that people are likely to be motivated to reduce dissonant cognitions. And, the strength of the pressure to reduce the dissonance is expected to be a direct function of its magnitude. The greater the dissonance, the greater the intensity of the action to decrease the dissonance and the greater the avoidance of situations that would increase the dissonance. There are several ways to decrease dissonance.

One powerful means of reducing dissonance is by changing behavior. While many theories, and common sense, might suggest that actions are determined by belief, one of the innovations of dissonance theory is that it proposes the opposite: actions may determine belief. In psychological terms,

> When the dissonance under consideration is between an element corresponding to some knowledge concerning environment. . . and a behavioral element, the dissonance can. . . be eliminated by changing the behavioral cognitive element in such a way that it is consonant with the environmental element. The simplest and easiest way in which this may be accomplished is to change the action or feeling which the behavioral element represents. Given that a cognition is responsive to 'reality,' . . . if the behavior of the organism changes, the cognitive element or elements corresponding to this behavior will likewise change. This method of reducing or eliminating dissonance is a very frequent occurrence.[8]

This hypothesis has important implications for our analysis, and we will return to it below.

A second method of dissonance reduction is changing an environmental cognitive element. But because it is difficult to control the environment, Festinger does not dwell on this option in his theory.

The third possibility is of considerable interest to us. Adding new cognitive elements, changing "knowledge" about something, is an effective means of reducing dissonance. This may be accomplished in several ways. One may actively seek out new information that would reduce the total dissonance and/or avoid new

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[8]Festinger, Dissonance, 19.

information that might increase existing dissonance. It is also possible to add new elements which "reconcile" two dissonant elements. To illustrate this last method, Festinger cites the case of the "Ifaluk" people, but there are an infinite number of parallel examples of this type of thought process. The Ifaluk are a nonliterate society which firmly believes that people are good. They believe that not only should people be good, but that they are good. Yet, by some quirk, the children of this culture are particularly aggressive, hostile, and destructive. It is clear that the Ifaluk belief in the intrinisic goodness of people is dissonant with the reality of the children's behavior. There are a number of possible ways in which the Ifaluk might have reduced the dissonance of this situation. They could have changed their belief about the nature of people or modified it such that people are wholly good only at maturity. Or, they could have redefined "good" to include the behavior of the Ifaluk children. But the society solved its problem by introducing a third belief, and effectively reduced the dissonance by "reconciliation." The Ifaluk created a belief in the existence of malevolent ghosts which enter into children and do bad things.[9] This construction allows for the Ifaluk to continue their belief in the goodness of people, even mischievous children: badness comes only with little demons.

While there are numerous ways to reduce dissonance, as well as an instinctual desire to do so, there are also several obstacles in the way. Festinger lists four factors which could discourage behavior leading to dissonance reduction: (1) The change may be painful or involve loss, (2) the present behavior may be otherwise satisfying, (3) it may be impossible to change some behavior, especially emotional reactions, and (4) to the extent that the element is consonant with a large number of other elements, and to the extent that changing it would replace these consonances by dissonances, the element will be resistant to change.[10]

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[9]Ibid., 19-23.
[10]Ibid., 25-27.

Of course, avoiding dissonance is even more desirable than reducing it. Festinger hypothesizes that a person would expose him/herself to new sources of information which s/he expected would increase consonance but would certainly avoid sources which would increase dissonance. Past experience may lead some to fear, and therefore to avoid, the initial occurrence of dissonance. Where this is true, one might expect circumspect behavior with regard to new information even when little or no dissonance is present to start with. In addition, a fear of dissonance may also lead to a reluctance to commit oneself behaviorally.[11]

Having outlined the broad underlying principles of dissonance theory, Festinger goes on to describe the theoretical consequences of making decisions. As stated above, dissonance can be seen as a practically inevitable consequence of making a decision. Rejecting something at least partially attractive thus requires some degree of "restructuring" or "revaluation" of the alternatives involved in the decision. An effective way of doing this is to change one's cognitions about the alternatives to increase the relative attractiveness of the chosen alternative and to decrease the relative attractiveness of the unchosen alternative. In common terms, this is known as rationalization. If we come to believe something is true, we persuade ourselves to believe that it is also desirable. Rationalization has been proven to occur experimentally: The pressure to decrease dissonance following a decision was reflected in an increase in the attractiveness of the chosen object and a decrease in the attractiveness of the rejected object.[12] This implies that if one were to make the decision again, the second decision would be easier, as the two alternatives would be more different in attractivess than they had been originally. Likewise, if for some reason a person had to try to reverse a decision at this point, it should be very

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[11] Ibid., 30.

[12] See J. Brehm, "Post-decision Changes in the Desirability of Alternatives," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 59 (1953) : 205-214 and M. Deutsch and N. Rosenau, "Dissonance or Defensiveness?" Journal of Personality , 30 (1962) : 16-28.

difficult, even if the initial decision had been very close. Another method of reducing post-decision dissonance is by establishing "cognitive overlap." This means taking elements corresponding to each of the alternatives and putting them in a context where they lead to the same end result. A child choosing between a movie and the circus can put both into the category of "entertainment."

As would be expected, the magnitude of post-decision dissonance has been hypothesized to depend upon the importance of the decision, the relative attractiveness of the unchosen alternative to the chosen one, and the similarity between the alternatives. It has also been hypothesized, and supported by experimental evidence, that once a decision has been made, an individual will attempt to actively avoid potentially dissonant information.[13] Festinger summarized the experimental data concerning the consequences of decisions:

(1) Following a decision there is active seeking out of information which produces cognition consonant with the action taken.

(2) Following a decision there is an increase in the confidence in the decision or an increase in the discrepancy in attractiveness between the alternatives involved in the choice, or both. Each reflects successful reduction of dissonance.

(3) The successful reduction of post-decision dissonance is futher shown in the difficulty of reversing a decision once it is made and in the implication which changed cognition has for future relevant action.

(4) The effects listed above vary directly with the magnitude of dissonance created by the decision.[14]

In 1962, Brehm and Cohen extended Festinger's theory to account for the effect of volition on the magnitude of dissonance. The greater the volition (that is, the perceived control of and responsibility for one's choice), the greater the dissonance.

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[13]Ehrlich, Guttman, Schoenbach and Mills, "Post-decision Exposure to Relevant information," cited in Festinger, Dissonance, 50-52.
[14]Festinger, Dissonance, 83.

If past volition, for example, could have easily prevented unpleasant consequences then dissonance would be created.[15]

Festinger's theory also includes some hypotheses which relate to exposure to potentially dissonance-producing information and social influences. Regarding interaction with other people, Festinger theorizes, "To the extent that others with whom one interacts do not share one's opinion, these others are a potential source of disssonance." And, as noted above, "A person rarely controls his environment sufficiently, or is even able to predict it sufficiently, to protect himself from dissonance-producing cognition."[16] One study found that their experimental subjects preferred not to face the implications of ideas opposed to their own so they would not be forced either to defend themselves or to admit error.[17]

While people will actively avoid those with opinions contrary to their own in order to preserve cognitive consistency, they will also seek out social support:

> The social group is at once a major source of cognitive dissonance for the individual and a major vehicle for eliminating and reducing the dissonance which may exist in him. . . . one of the most effective ways of eliminating dissonance is to discard one set of cognitive elements in favor of another, something which can sometimes only be accomplished if one can find others who agree with the cognitions one wishes to retain and maintain.[18]

This means that agreement with other people reduces dissonance and disagreement with others increases dissonance. Festinger postulates, "The existence of disagreement among members of a group on some issue or some opinion, if perceived by the members, certainly produces cognitive dissonance. . . . The cognitive elements corresponding to some opinion the person holds would be

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[15] J. Brehm and A. Cohen, "Explorations in Cognitive Dissonance," cited in C. Insko, Theories of Attitude Change (New York, 1962), 204-205.
[16] Festinger, Dissonance, 133-134.
[17] Cooper and Jahoda, "The Evasion of Propaganda: How Prejudiced People Respond to Anti-prejudice Propaganda," cited in Festinger, Dissonance, 135.
[18] Festinger, Dissonance, 177.

dissonant with knowing that another person holds a contrary opinion. . . . Knowing someone holds the same position is consonant with holding that opinion oneself."[19]

Three variables affect the magnitude of social influence. The first is the relevance of the disagreeing person, or the group in which the disagreement is voiced. The more relevant, the more dissonance is created by the expression of the disagreement. The second is the attractiveness of the person voicing the disagreement of the group in which it is raised. The last factor is the extent of the disagreement itself.[20]

There are also three methods by which to reduce the dissonance stemming from social disagreement: (1) Changing one's own opinion so that it corresponds more closely with one's knowledge of what others believe, (2) influencing those persons who disagree to change their opinion so that it more closely corresponds to one's own. Both of these choices represent an attempt to move toward unity within the group, and have been proven experimentally to occur.[21] The third possibility is to make the other person, who doesn't agree, in some manner not comparable to oneself. This may be done either by attributing different characteristics, experiences or motives to the other, or by rejecting or denigrating the other.[22]

A situation sometimes arises in which groups commit themselves to a certain course of action. At the time the action is taken most of the persons in the group have cognitions which are mainly consonant with the action. Future developments, occurring either independently or as a consequence of the action, may then produce new cognitions which are dissonant with the knowledge on the basis of

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[19]Ibid., 178-179.

[20]Ibid., 180-181.

[21]P. Blau, "Orientation of College Students toward International Relations," American Journal of Sociology, 59 (1953) : 205-214. Blau showed that changes in opinion which occurred over a two-year period were largely in the direction of dissonance reduction.

[22]Festinger, Dissonance, 181-182.

which the action was taken and continues. If all or most of the group has the same dissonant response, social support for the attempted reduction of dissonance will be easily forthcoming, and the belief may be retained. Common sense tells us that if everyone believes it, it must be true. Experimental evidence supports this; dissonance reduction does occur through attainment of social support.[23] If, however, a person with dissonance is surrounded by persons who will not support his/her attempts at reducing dissonance, the dissonance may very likely be increased to the point where the person discards the maverick belief.

When Leon Festinger originated the theory of cognitive dissonance in 1957, he provided the point of departure for other theorists and researchers who subsequently offered alternative explanations on a number of issues. We will examine some of these here.

Rosenberg and Abelson have added to Festinger's theory with their work on balance and imbalance (their terminology for consonance and dissonance). Their theory belongs to the consistency genre; it states that once a person discovers an inconsistency in his/her "conceptual arena" [thinking] there will be some attempt to correct the imbalance. Such resolution may be accomplished in one of three ways:

(1) a change in one or more of the elements,

(2) redefinition or differentiation of one or more of the elements, and

(3) ignoring the inconsistency.

The authors cite the example of a student at not-then co-ed Yale. This hypothetical student was in favor of having women on campus, wanted good grades, and believed that women at school would interfere with his getting good grades. These three elements are not balanced. To correct the problem, he could

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[23] Ibid., 211-212. Raw data provided by Dr. William McGuire to Festinger.

(1) change one of the elements

a) oppose women on campus
b) not care about good grades
c) not see a correlation between women on campus and worse grades,

(2) redefine "C" as a "good grade,"

(3) not think about it.

Laboratory data supported their hypotheses.[24] Experimental subjects displayed evidence of attempting to restore balance by the use of these mechanisms.

Abelson proposed another conception of imbalance resolution. Resolution may occur by means of one of four methods, or modes, along a hierarchy from cognitively easy to difficult, simple to more complex. The first mode is denial, or alteration of one or more cognitive relations. This corresponds to both (1) and (3) in the Rosenberg and Abelson conceptualization. The Yale student who refuses to believe that having women on campus would interfere with good grades is also denying there is a problem. The next method is bolstering, or adducing additional consistent relations with one or the other of the inconsistent cognitive units. This "drowns out" the inconsistency. The student could decide, for example, that a brilliant woman biology major could come in handy around finals. Abelson points out that this is the type of mechanism referred to by Festinger in which a person tries to build up consonant elements to outnumber dissonant ones. Abelson's third mode is differentiation, as in the scheme he outlined with Rosenberg. Here a student redefines "getting good grades" to mean both "getting C's" and "getting A's". Transcendence, the fourth and most complex method of imbalance resolution in this conception, is accomplished by relating both of the inconsistent cognitive units to a larger, over-arching concept or element: "For example, the inconsistency between science and religion may be transcended by reasoning that both science and

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[24]M. Rosenberg and R. Abelson, "An Analysis of Cognitive Balancing, " cited in C. Insko, Theories of Attitude Change , 182-183.

religion are necessary in order to achieve a fuller life or deeper understanding of the universe."[25] Transcendence is a kind of reverse differentiation, in that it sees the two disparate beliefs as part of a larger--transcendent--unity.

Also noteworthy is Rosenberg and Abelson's affective-cognitive consistency theory which rests on the supposition that affect toward an object is interconnected with cognitions or beliefs about that object. Thus, a change in the affective component of the attitude structure should result in a change in the cognitive component and vice versa. This is consistent with the theory (of Festinger and others) that attitude may follow behavior. For example, if a doctor changed her attitude toward socialized medicine from negative to positive she would also be inclined to change her previously-held belief that socialized medicine leads to the debasement of medical standards. Rosenberg and Abelson's Attitudinal Homeostasis theory predicts that change occurs in the direction of consistency between affect and cognition, and may be summarized here briefly:

(1) When the affective and cognitive components of an attitude are mutually consistent the attitude is in a stable state.

(2) When these components are mutually inconsistent, to a degree that exceeds the individual's "tolerance limit" for such inconsistency, the attitude is in an unstable state.

(3) In such an unstable state the attitude will undergo reorganizing activity until one of three possible outcomes is achieved:

a) rejection of the element which caused the original inconsistency. That is, restoration of the original stable and consistent attitude,

b) "fragmentation" of the attitude through isolating the cognitve and affective elements,[26] and

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[25]R. Abelson, "Modes of Resolution of Belief Dilemmas," cited in C. Insko, Theories of Attitude Change, 183.

[26]It may be useful to conceive of both "fragmentaion" and "transcendence" as "compartmentalization," by which an individual assigns different purposes to potentially dissonant beliefs. One may subscribe to one aspect of a thing without subscribing to another.

c) accommodation, or change of attitude, in order to stabilize the cognitive and affective components.[27]

As noted above, while we readily accept the notion that an attitude can cause a behavior, there is evidence that under certain conditions, one of the most effective ways to change attitudes is to change behavior. In fact, as Daryl Bem has stated, "This may even be easier than the other way around. . . . Most people agree that the question, 'Why do you eat brown bread?' can properly be answered with 'Because I like it.' I should like to convince you, however, that the question, 'Why do you like brown bread?' frequently ought to be answered with 'Because I eat it.' "[28]

It has been shown experimentally that individuals induced to engage in behavior inconsistent with their beliefs or attitudes will attempt to reduce dissonance by convincing themselves that they actually hold the beliefs inspired by their behavior. In one study, the less students were paid to write essays promoting ideas they did not previously support, the more they ultimately came to believe what they had written. It appears that higher payment gave the students a legitimate reason to write an essay that was contrary to their belief. In contrast, students paid smaller sums needed another reason for explaining their behavior.[29] Similarly, Lieberman produced non-laboratory evidence indicating than a change in behavior may cause a change in belief. Factory workers' beliefs and attitudes changed markedly upon promotion. Furthermore, different attitudes developed depending on whether they were elected to union steward or foreman positions.[30]

The effect of social influence on attitude and attitude change cannot be underestimated. Many researchers have observed that beliefs and values change in

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[27]Rosenberg and Abelson, "An Analysis of Cognitive Balancing," 177-178.
[28]Daryl Bem, Beliefs, Attitudes and Human Affairs (Belmont, California, 1970), 54.
[29]Ibid., 58.
[30]S. Lieberman, " The Effects of Changes in Roles on the Attitudes of Role Occupants," cited in Bem, Beliefs, 66.

the "socially desirable" direction.[31] Daryl Bem (a self-proclaimed product of a Reform Jewish household) calls it "bubbapsychology." That is, "Just as your bubba always said: The major influence on people is people."[32] The reward of social approval is a most powerful factor on behavior, especially that of the leaders of one's reference group. An individual's reference group provides one with the glasses through which one looks at the world. Thus, any group to which an individual refers for comparing, judging, and deciding upon opinions and behaviors may be said to be one's reference group. Kelley and Woodruff showed that if an individual's reference group changed its mind, the individual was likely to follow suit.[33]

The credibility of the individual or group is a critical factor in influencing behavior and attitude. It is clear that there will be more opinion change in the desired direction if the communicator has high credibility than if s/he has low credibility. Credibility is a function of perceived expertise and trustworthiness, according to Robert Abelson.[34] Another team of investigators postulate:

> Since prestigious individuals may be seen as indicators of the social climate, conclusions advocated by these individuals may arouse the expectation of reinforcing social approval and thus produce acceptance or agreement.[35]

This conclusion is based on research like that indicating that a communication represented as coming from a high credibility source is more persuasive than the

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[31]For example, M. Rokeach, Beliefs, Attitudes and Values, cited in Bem, Beliefs, 26-27.
[32]Bem, Beliefs, 77.
[33]H.Kelley and C. Woodruff, "Members' Reactions to Apparent Group Approval of a Counternorm Communication," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 52 (1956), 67-74.
[34]R. Abelson, "Modes of Resolution of Belief Dilemmas," cited in P. Zimbardo and E. Ebbesen, Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior (Stanford, 1970), 20.
[35]C. Hovland, I. Janis, and H. Kelley, Communication and Persuasion, cited in C. Insko, Theories of Attitude Change, 14.

same communication represented as coming from a low credibility source.[36] One may inquire about the nature of the causal relationship between prestige and being an indicator of the social climate. Which comes first? Do the prestigious define the social climate, or does the social climate determine who is prestigious? While we may not know the answer, the existence of this variable has important implications for our study.

Having thus surveyed a portion of the vast literature on the subject of attitude change and social influence we may now proceed to apply some of the theories and research data to our observations of the Reform movement. The fundamental assumptions of cognitive consistency theory, especially dissonance and social influence theories, may help explain developments in both early and later Reform. But it is essential to state that, however compelling, our analysis is purely theoretical. By noting attitude changes and then applying psychological theories to explain them after the fact, we are departing from standard scientific procedure which typically states a hypothesis and then tests it. Conclusive proof of our arguments may come only with experimental tests of the hypotheses.

(In)Consistency and Ritual Mitzvot in the American Reform Movement

The very essence of Reform as an alternative to traditional Judaism is inherently dissonance-producing. Judaism had remained essentially unchanged for centuries before the emergence of Reform Judaism. Despite the minor nature of the first reforms, the fact that there were reforms at all was not at all minor. The first changes produced two groups of Jews, those who favored them and those who did not. This meant that Jews had to choose between the groups. Festinger tells us that any decision is likely to cause dissonance. He also states that the magnitude of

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[36]C. Hovland and W. Weiss, "The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness," cited in C. Insko, Theories of Attitude Change, 44.

dissonance production depends on the importance of the issue. Surely, a person's Jewish identity was of great importance at the time of the first reforms. We make this assumption based on the fact that more Jews chose to reform rather than to abandon Judaism altogether. The first reforms were, in fact, aimed at preserving rather than destroying Judaism in the modern world. Had Judaism not been important to Reform Jews, they would have totally rejected it. In psychological terms, Judaism served as a critical "reference group" for Jews, one they were reluctant to lose. But the establishment of a movement of Reform Jews created a second reference group. Dissonance was unavoidable: Jews were faced with the decision of choosing between ideologies and reference groups.

The existence of more than one type of Judaism led to the inevitable question of which was "authentic." The debates over "authenticity" strongly indicate dissonance. Different Jewish groups have felt the need to justify their own existence. They have done this in various ways, but the critical point is that for each group there is a struggle to convince both themselves and others that they are right.

In their defense, the Orthodox have rightfully claimed authenticity based on consistency throughout history; Orthodox practice in the late nineteenth century was essentially identical to that of the fifteenth century. On the other hand, Reform Judaism (also rightfully) claimed authenticity based on history by simply pointing to a different reality. For, while it is true that some things remained the same within Judaism, it is also true that other things changed substantially. Reform thinkers have stated that Judaism has never been static. Rather, it made substantial changes throughout history in order to survive. Early Reformers often pointed to ancient examples of "Reformers" like the Pharisees. The evolutionary nature of Judaism, with its deep roots in history, was a frequent pro-Reform argument. We recall that the credibility hypothesis of Hovland and his associates predicts that

there will be more opinion change in the desired direction when the communicator has high rather than low credibility. It is therefore desirable to find examples of Reform as far back in history as possible, because antiquity is an excellent indicator of authority. People will oftentimes attach credibility with age. We will return to the credibility issue as it applies specifically to changing attitudes toward mitzvah.

Festinger's theory postulates that the rejection of one alternative with some favorable characteristics (which we may assume to be the case with respect to traditional Judaism for the early Reformers), leads to the restructuring or revaluation of the alternatives involved in the decision. This is often accomplished by attempts to decrease the attractiveness of the unchosen alternative and bolster the attractiveness of the chosen object. It is here again that the factor of reference groups reappears. Being both "Jew" and "American" created conflict and dissonance. The Orthodox resolved the problem by being as Jewish as possible, rejecting much of western culture. Reform Jews chose the other path. In the Classical period of Reform Judaism, the most important reference group for Reform Jews was "American," although "Jew" as reference was not rejected totally, as noted above. Thus, the Classical Reformers eliminated as many differences between the reference groups "Jew" and "American" as possible. Kaufmann Kohler's opposition to "Orientalism" may thus be understood in terms of dissonance reduction. Old (Eastern) views were inferior to new (Western) ones. Much of the attractiveness of Reform was in its newness, and in its similarity to standard "American" religion ("church" decorum, calling rabbis "minister," organ music, mixed seating, even Sunday services for some).

We may also explain the early Reform movement's acceptance of the binding quality of ethical mitzvot, and comcomitant virtual rejection of ritual mitzvot, within the context of social-psychological theory. Early Reformers reduced dissonance by differentiating between the two types of mitzvot. While it is true that

tradition always maintained the essential nature of both ritual and ethical mitzvot, the majority of attention was directed toward the minutiae of ritual practice. Scrupulous observance of detail was not compatible with modernity, especially with turn-of-the-century emphasis on the spiritual aspects of religion in the western world. The observance of ethical mitzvot became desirable for Jews trying to establish consistency between religion and environment. Their less conspicuous nature allowed Jews easier access into the American reference group. Isaac M. Wise once put it this way: "Whatever makes us ridiculous before the world as it now is, may safely be and should be abolished."[37]

In contrast, later Reform thinking stressed the centrality of Jewishness and Judaism and a Jewish life. In essence, the movement called for Reform Jews to claim "Jew" as their primary reference group. (We will return to the question of why this change occurred.) Because one of the fundamental parts of (traditional) Judaism has always been ritual, the Reform movement moved toward the acceptance of ritual. The Centenary Perspective, in its paragraph on the obligations of religious practice, states, "Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life. . . . Reform Judaism shares this emphasis. . . ."[38] This statement clearly links Reform with the rest of Judaism, which means the acceptance of a life of practice, not just ideology. Calls for a return to a Jewish lifestyle were calls for a return to Jewish ritual practice. That is, few equated enhanced Jewishness with enhanced ethical standards. Jewishness became equated with religious practice, not with ethical conduct based firmly on Jewish tradition. The following example is significant due to its uniqueness. In the context of the debate between Mihaly and Plaut in 1975, Rabbi Jack Stern cautioned against defining the Jewish way as only ritualistic. He stressed that ethics was also a part of

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[37]Heller, Wise, 559.
[38]Eugene Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today, Book Three, 15.

Jewish living and should be included in any program or formulation. Options for Jewish living should not only be ritual options.[39]

Ethical mitzvot also enjoyed the sanction of the highest possible authority--God. The early Reformers accepted the divine origin of the ethical mitzvot, while declaring the ritual mitzvot to have been humanly created. The effect of the credibility factor is obvious here. Furthermore, leaders of the Reform movement, highly credible sources, advocated Reform principles. Orthodoxy lost its prestige, through the transference of primary reference group and the consequent perception by Reform Jews that Orthodoxy was "foreign," for example, making Orthodox leaders less credible authorities for liberal Jews.

The same principles may be applied to explain the acceptance of ritual mitzvot (to whatever degree) by the majority of Reform Jews. Some of the most influential contemporary members of the CCAR (including W. Gunther Plaut who would become chair of the all-important Committee on Reform Jewish Practice and eventually Conference President, and Eugene Borowitz, respected HUC-JIR professor of theology) have spoken in favor of more traditional conceptions of mitzvah. The influence of these prestigious leaders cannot be underestimated, especially because they cited an even more authoritative advocate of their position. As we observed in previous chapters, several modern philosophies of mitzvah identified God as the metzaveh. It is also interesting, as well as surprising, that at the one hundredth anniversary commemoration of the Pittsburgh Platform, several speakers described the halachic nature of the Pittsburgh Platform. It is clear from our previous discussion that the framers of that platform did not intend to produce a halachic document. This "revisionist history" is instructive for it attempts to show that

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[39]Jack Stern, Jr., "Religious Discipline and Liberal Judaism," CCARYB, 85 (1975) : 188.

Reform never strayed far from tradition, after all.[40] The essay by Sigal, a Conservative rabbi, is important in terms of the credibility argument. The approval of a more traditional scholar would be expected to be very rewarding and consequently helpful in reducing dissonance associated with the early anti-halachic statement of Reform Judaism.

Thus far, we have documented the change of reference group allegiances and pointed out some of the methods for coping with the dissonance brought about by changes in attitude, but we have heretofore by passed the most critical question of this discussion. Why did the Reform movement change its perspective on mitzvah? It is my contention that the attitudinal change observed in the American Reform movement with respect to ritual mitzvot may be attributed largely to attempted reduction of cognitive dissonance.

While in reality ethics does not, or should not, exist solely in principle, people often conceive of it this way, perhaps due to its "invisible" nature. While it is hard to miss someone laying tefillin, impeccable business ethics based on Jewish principles may go unnoticed (or at least unattributed to Jewish teachings). This may contribute to the critical "authenticity" issue. Classical Reform lacked the practice of visible mitzvot. It is likely that non-Reform Jews felt conflict between their traditional beliefs and those that were more normative and modern. In an attempt to reduce their own dissonance they came to characterize Reform as "minimalist" (bad, inadequate, wrong) Judaism; "authentic" (good, proper, correct, and most importantly, their own) Judaism, by contrast, was that which included rituals. Classical Reform Jews stressed the ethical as the essence of Judaism and made ethical practice authentic. They were thus able to reduce dissonance with respect to the

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[40]See Samuel Karff, "The Theology of the Pittsburgh Platform," and Phillip Sigal, "Halakhic Reflections on the Pittsburgh Platform," in Walter Jacob, ed., The Changing World of Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect (Pittsburgh, 1985).

positions of the other, more traditional, movements. Contrarily, when later Reform Jews accepted "Jew" as their primary reference group, they also conceptualized Classical Reform as "minimalist." Moving toward a life of Jewish religious practice has allowed the alleviation of dissonance in the modern period.

It is here that we mention the name-calling that has consistently passed between the different Jewish religious movements. Kohler used the term "Orientalism," which was not meant complimentarily, to de-legitimize Orthodoxy. Orthodox thinkers, Alexander Kohut, for example, charged Reformers with the ruin of Judaism. It is interesting that Reform leaders also used emotionally charged terminology to further their own cause in comparison with that of another Reformer. Thus, we hear the term "anarchy" used to describe religious freedom, and "Orthodoxy" (meant deprecatingly) to characterize the return to tradition.

There are indications that Reform Jews always felt the need to explain their beliefs. Ironically, I suspect this is the case because of numerous arguments stressing the need to overcome the feeling of needing to apologize. In 1910 CCAR president Max Heller stressed, "Nor need we apologize, at this late day, for the existence of Reform Judaism."[41] Seventy years later Eugene Lipman spelled out the problem:

> Some of us Reform Jews ask our questions because we are uncertain about our authenticity: many of us some of the time, some of us most of the time. . . . We are and have been subject to such a barrage of accusations of inauthenticity, from within as well as from without, that we wonder about ourselves. So we are aggressively defensive at times, we are haltingly rationalistic at times, we are plain uncomfortable at times. It is hard for us to be clear and confident about ourselves as a movement.[42]

It is clear that Reform Jews have been plagued by feelings of inauthenticity. Orthodox claims of authenticity contradict Reform self-perceptions of legitimacy

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[41]Max Heller, "President's Message," CCARYB, 20 (1910) : 160.
[42]Eugene Lipman, "Change and Authenticity," CCARYB, 92 (1982) : 21-22.

and thereby create dissonance. Acceptance of mitzvah provided Reform Jewish entry into "authentic" Judaism.

There are numerous references by contemporary Reform Jews advocating a return to mitzvah for the sake of "k'lal Yisrael." The term refers to the collective body of all Jews, from ultra-Orthodox to secular, but is often misunderstood. Many use the term as if it meant traditional Judaism, meaning that something satisfies the requirements of k'lal Yisrael when in reality it satisfies the demands of Orthodoxy. Thus, it was argued that an acceptance of mitzvah would mean greater acceptance by k'lal Yisrael. This is, of course, an incorrect notion, for surely Jewish secularists are not at all concerned with ritual mitzvot. Nevertheless, it was argued that Reform should move toward more traditional, more "valid" Judaism. In 1983 Herman Schaalman, in noting that the Columbus Platform had brought the Reform movement toward total acceptance of the corporate, collective nature of Jewish life, linked "valid" Judaism with the "k'lal:"

> We have recovered our link to the totality of Israel, the k'lal, beyond any effective challenge from within or without. . . . We are Israel by our intention and by the testimony of our lives lived by legitimating principles and practices derived from our carefully considered conception of Jewish values, beliefs and practices.[43]

We recognize that Schaalman intended to connect Reform with more traditional forms of Judaism, despite his misuse of the term "k'lal." The important point is that this association provides a larger reference group for Reform Jews. No longer must Reform Jews feel totally isolated from all other Jews. Social influence theory stresses the rewarding effect of the social support of a large group: the more people who agree with you, the more right you are.

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[43]Herman Schaalman, "Assessing the State and Direction of our Movement," presented at the Ninety-Third Annual Meeting of the CCAR, held in New York, June 28-July 1, 1982, pp. 3-4.

We observed above that early Reform tried to authenticate itself by noting the evolutionary nature of Judaism throughout its history. Likewise, modern Reformers used the ancient and ongoing affinity of Judaism for ritual to prove its legitimacy for Reform acceptance. The notion gained credibility because of its antiquity.

We must return briefly to the issue of ethical "versus " ritual mitzvot in the Reform movement. We have seen that while Judaism stressed the essential nature of both types, more emphasis was traditionally put on the ritual. In contrast, Reform favored the ethical. In 1975 Jack Stern touched on this issue with this remark:

> We need a sense of Reform Judaism with such mutual self-respect that we will no longer feel compelled either to plead as beggars for admission into K'lal Yisrael, or to stand on the outside and be angry, for then we shall know that we are already part of K'lal--that just as Orthodox and Conservative preserved certain aspects of the tradition which deserve our serious attention, so have we revived and preserved our own aspects, such as the prophetic tradition of Tikkun Olam, which deserves their serious attention.[44]

Stern's last comment about the positive contribution of Reform may be seen as an example of the argument that "authentic" Judaism includes both the ethical and the ritual. He also implies that Reform Jews should be proud of the tradition of social conscience which is so integral to Reform.

However, there are strong indications that this idea was never truly accepted by the movement. By way of example we note the publication of three guides to Reform religious practice and no such guide pertaining to ethical mitzvot, despite numerous mentions of the desirability of one. Simeon Maslin's reference to the necesssity of publishing a guide to ethics "so as not to compromise the Reform emphasis on ethics over mitzvah,"[45] illustrates the tension surrounding this point effectively. Maslin spoke these words in 1982, after the CCAR's publication of A Shabbat Manual, and Gates of Mitzvah and just prior to the appearance of Gates of the Seasons, all guides to

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[44]Jack J. Stern, Jr., "Religious Discipline and Liberal Judasim," CCARYB, 85 (1975) : 190

[45]supra, page 59 [chapter 2]

ritual practice. Despite the "Reform emphasis" on ethics, the ethical values found acknowledgment only twice in these three official CCAR publications: Arthur Lelyveld's piece in Gates of Mitzvah and a brief mention in the foreword to Gates of the Seasons. We recall the statement in Schaalman's theological essay in Gates of Mitzvah: "Why should we do mitzvot? . . . All authentic Judaism until now has so understood itself."[46] The publication of the guides to ritual mitzvot allowed for movement toward more traditional Jewish values and the consequent reduction of the dissonance. Ethics had apparently become a less burning concern.

It is logical to assume that the "other side," that which did not favor a return to tradition, also exhibits evidence of cognitive dissonance regarding the nature of Reform's commitment to tradition and mitzvah. The theories suggest that it is helpful to try to persuade others of the "rightness" of one's arguments. With this is mind, we turn to Albert Goldstein's reaction to the word "adequate" in the following question, posed to respondents on the tenth anniversary of the Gates of Prayer: "Do you find the addition of previously omitted traditional features like the Chatsi Kaddish, blessings prior to donning the talit and tefillin, etc., adequate?" Goldstein pointed out that "adequate" assumed an attitude favoring the move toward tradition in Reform. He expressed his dismay over Reform developments:

> A recent CCAR publication regaled its readers with news of the fresh production and and enthusiastic peformance of a Reform service for tashlich. What next? Are there similar plans on some 'creative' ritualist's drawing board? Say, a newly revised version of shlog'n kapores to be included in an official UAHC-sponsored Guide for Reform Jewish Practice? Or perhaps a colorful assortment of Baskin-illuminated imitation-parchment petition forms (with appropriately placed blank spaces left for the pious petitioner to fill in with his requests, and addressed to any of a separately-supplied list of long-gone Jewish worthies) ideal for stuffing into a crevice between stones in the Kotel?[47]

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[46]supra, page 36 [chapter 1].

[47]"Communications" regarding article "GOP: Ten Years Later," Journal of Reform Judaism, 33 (Spring, 1986) : 85.

While we must be careful not to label every persuasive communication as an attempt at dissonance reduction, it is entirely possible that there have been enough challenges to Goldstein's opinion to have created dissonance in his mind regarding mitzvah and tradition and a Classical Reform approach to Judaism.

We postponed discussion of "halachah" and Reform Judaism until now for we did not possess the tools necessary for an adequate understanding of the issue. Solomon Freehof and others wrote volume after volume of Reform responsa, a form of "halachic" literature. Freehof, even while employing the traditional method of she'elot and teshuvot, stressed the "guiding" rather than "binding" nature of his work. Many have commented about the ambivalence inherent within Freehof's methodology. In addition, the question of the appropriateness of any Reform halachah has been a frequently recurring one. It was noted above that while "mitzvah" has been incorporated into mainstream Reform theology, "halachah" has not. Consistency theory may help us understand some of the issues surrounding Reform and halachah. While "mitzvah" helps Reform Jews reduce dissonance by allowing Reform to be more consistent with other forms of Judaism, "halachah" goes too far. Halachah is, for most Reform Jews, closely associated with Orthodoxy. Reform Jews, regardless of their commitment to tradition and mitzvot, are still adamantly not Orthodox. Reform would never accept traditional halachah, and "Reform halachah" sounds to many like an oxymoron. Even a liberal halachah is problematic. Reform has consistently avoided anything even remotely ecclesiastical or legislative, and halachah falls into this category. It is extremely difficult to reconcile halachah with other Reform values; consistency is jeopardized. Freehof's own inconsistency may, in fact, be attributed to unresolved dissonance. Both his negative and postive attitudes toward the role of halachah in Reform are reflected in his responses.

This debate has occurred many times in the course of the movement's history, with no real resolution. The previously mentioned Mihaly-Plaut debate was primarily concerned with the question, "Is Reform Judaism only authentic Judaism when it makes demands?" Traditional Judaism answers in the affirmative; Reform has agonized over the question throughout its entire history. And, because of our knowledge of consistency theory, we may assume that this nagging lack of resolution is uncomfortable. Dissonance reduction is dependent on the success of attempts at resolving the issue Those who have answered the question definitively (one way or the other) have been able to argue their opinion effectively. Traditional polemics are thus attractively compelling. But Reform presentations tend to be inconsistent in nature, suggesting that few have resolved the dissonance. It is intellectually difficult to accept the theology of Wise, for example, who so carefully distinguished between the revelation of the Decalogue and the rest of Jewish tradition. Borowitz's conception that God established a Covenant with Jews and has power over them may be problematic for those with either a non-theistic God-concept or a metaphorical understanding of revelation.

It is instructive, however, that religious leaders do not always wait for people to agree before asking them to engage in some sort of behavior. The Reform movement has also made use of the "act first-believe later" principle with the suggestions in Gates of Mitzvah and Gates of the Seasons that individuals begin to practice in order to get an idea of whether they will find it meaningful. The authors suggest that the performance of one mitzvah will lead to another. This suggests that they understand the psychological concept of the development of attitudes following from behavior. Philip Zimbardo and Ebbe B. Ebbeson have this to say about the persuasiveness of religious leaders:

> The reader might also find fruitful, in his search for techniques of attitude change, accounts of how religious evangelists operate. . . . Most significant is their use of public commitment--of coming

> forward, taking a vow, making an overt pledge, or speaking out. They do not wait until their audience believes before requesting it to act, but rather work on the now firmly established psychological principle. . . . that beliefs change following a commitment to behavior discrepant with the original beliefs. In fact, in the Old Testament the rabbis [sic!] are enjoined not to make their parishoners or converts believe in God before they are asked to pray, but to have them pray first so that belief will follow.[48]

Although Zimbardo and Ebbeson could use a lesson in "Old Testament," they are right even though they are wrong. That is, traditional Judaism does encourage the practice of rituals and the recitation of prayers even without accompanying intentionality (kavanah). Surely kavanah is desirable, but it is not necessary. Ritual and prayer are necessary. The prayerbook of the Reform movement, Gates of Prayer, on its first page, includes the teaching to which Zimbardo and Ebbeson refer: "The rebbe of Tsanz was asked by a Chasid: What does the Rabbi do before praying: 'I pray, was the reply, that I may be able to pray properly.'" Likewise, Freehof declared that once the practice is there, "a doctrine will emerge."[49] He also claimed:

> The foundation of Jewish religious life is Jewish practice upon which are built habits of mind and attitudes to the universe. . . . We do not begin with theology, we arrive at theology.[50]

Being a Reform Jew has always meant making decisions. And, because the inconsistency of arbitrary choice is uncomfortable, some Reform Jews have tried an "all or nothing approach." This tactic, while difficult, avoids any post-decision dissonance, for there are virtually no decisions. Thus, when early Reform Jews rejected belief in a literal Sinaitic Revelation, some felt the need to abandon nearly all of Jewish tradition. To be consistent, one rejection led to another. Modern Reform is psychologically more challenging. For example, the authors of Gates of

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[48]P. Zimbardo and E. Ebbeson, Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior (Reading, Mass., 1970), 12-13.
[49]Solomon B. Freehof, Contemporary Reform Responsa (Cincinnati, 1974), 6.
[50]Freehof, Reform Jewish Practice (Cincinnati, 1954), 4.

the Seasons consider all of Jewish tradition potentially acceptable, and place the burden of proof on those who will reject any particular practice. Because individual choice and responsibility are considered essential principles in modern Reform, the demands on the individual to choose consistently are great. Not being successful at this would, according to the theory, produce dissonance. Dissonance would manifest itself in confusing statements, "inconsistent" practice, and varying degrees of ambivalence. We have noted all of the above.

Daryl Bem postulated that consistency is not the desired goal of the human being after all, and that intellectuals and scientists give consistency too much credit:

> the fact remains that at least 23% of the American people, unlike the intellectuals who make up consistency theories, pay little attention to issues, rarely worry about the consistency of their opinions, and spend little or no time thinking about the presuppositions and implications which distinguish one political orientation from another.[51]

Bem therefore argues for the development of a theory stressing the desirability of inconsistency in thought. Although he offers no such theory, we may wonder if Bem is not right. Why do Reform Jews often opt for discomfort when there is another choice? Perhaps for them as liberals there is no other choice: Kasheh lihyot liberali--it is difficult to be a Liberal Jew.

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[51]Daryl Bem, Beliefs, 38.

FINAL REMARKS

Setting aside theological principles and psychological hypotheses for the moment, we may consider the common sense value of moderation. In a world of extremes, the middle ground is often the most desirable, the "safest," most comfortable place to be. And today's religious world is indeed an arena of extreme positions. The world appears to have repeatedly experienced swings in which religion was more and less important. The ancient world revolved around religion, as did the Middle Ages. Modern thought and industrialization coupled to lessen the role of religion. The 1960's saw perhaps the greatest swing away from religion in modern times, with "God is dead" theology and a large-scale rejection of industrialized religion. The ascendency of the Ayotollah Khomeni to a position of power in Iran in the late 1970's signaled that the pendulum had swung back. Religion is again a dominant force in the world, but with a new flavor. The Ayotollah Khomeni is not just a religious leader, he is a fundamentalist Moslem. Our previous United States president was a "born-again Christian." Orthodox Judaism, too, has enjoyed a resurgence with an increase in the number of baalei teshuvah. It is clear that the Reform Judaism of today is significantly more traditional than the Classical Reform of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is also true, however, that against the backdrop of late nineteenth century religion and contemporary fundamentalism, Reform Judaism represents a moderate position.

In the final analysis, much of the struggle of the Reform movement throughout its existence seems to be one of striving towards moderation. Reform has consistently looked for balance. Much of the tension in the movement has stemmed from a desire to feel and to appear "authentic" and "legitimate" within Judaism, as well as in the larger community in which Reform Jews found themselves. Classical and contemporary Reform Judaism may have emphasized one community over the

other, but American Reform Jews have always wanted to be both "real Jews" and "real Americans."

Reform theology has also remained moderate. Interpretations which strayed too far, or broke completely from traditional understandings were either never widely accepted, or they quickly disappeared. The ideas of Alvin Reines and Roland Gittelsohn may be intellectually challenging, but they were never incorporated into the mainstream of Reform theology. On the contrary, a theology which stressed some sort of interaction with God has prevailed throughout.

In addition, while Reform Judaism always theoretically acknowledged commitment to both ethical and ritual practices, in reality one usually prevailed. Classical Reform favored the ethical. Modern Reform has thus far directed much more energy toward the ritual. There are indications today that the trend is toward a balance of ritual and ethical mitzvot in Reform Jewish life. Our already published guides and platforms stress an integrated Jewish life of religious practice, but the CCAR promises a guide on ethical mitzvot in the near future.

In 1987 UAHC President Alexander Schindler stated that "the present-day plague of ethical nihilism has scarcely passed us by."[1] Schindler remarked,

> I have never felt compelled to touch upon this matter in the course of my fifteen years as your President. My longiloquent Biennial messages have sounded many themes, but never this. Yet the ethical crisis of our time, the pervasive breakdown of accepted norms of conduct, has jarred me to the realization that we need something more than a task force on liturgical music, or an outreach program for intermarried couples, or even a heightened sense of Shabbat, that before we can properly speak of "going forth" and "reaching out," we had best undergo a refresher course in the alef-beit of Jewish morality and ethics.[2]

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[1]Alexander Schindler, "Presidential Address," presented at the Fifty-Ninth General Assembly of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, held in Chicago, October 29-November 3, 1987, p. 3.

[2]Ibid.

Schindler thus called for serious efforts by the pertinent Reform committees and commissions to ensure that Jewish morality is transmitted effectively to Reform Jews.

The Reform debate over authority has also found a middle position. The principle of "authority by consent" seems to have prevailed. The wording of the 1987 resolution on religious commitment adopted by the General Assembly of the UAHC illustrates this concept as it calls upon "our entire religious community to perceive and embrace Judaism as a way of life and as an approach to the world 'that makes demands upon its adherents.'"[3] Reform Jews are asked to accept the authority of Judaism as they interpret it.

Reform teaching stresses our personal involvement with our choices. We are presented with an array of theological and practical conceptions from which to choose, and we are free to determine for ourselves what will be meaningful. We may also elect to include our own creative responses. Contemporary Reform has achieved a middle ground in which liberal theology co-exists with, indeed demands, a Jewish life enhanced by religious practice together with fulfillment of ethical mandates.

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[3]Resolutions Adopted by the Fifty-Ninth General Assembly of the UAHC, (1987), p. 24

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